

## THE POLES OF IDEA AND REALITY (AND THE DE-FUTURISING OF ART AND HUMANITY)

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**ABSTRACT:** Fred Polak's futurology takes up where F. W. Schelling's claims about the 'modern mythology' leaves off. Linking these, I argue Art and humanity's joint meaning crisis originates in 'symbolic idealism', de-futurising both and crippling humanity's attempts to develop a proper internal 'narrative order of goods' needed for our survival. Polak's tracing of how various forms of Expressionism emerged from Impressionism in later modernism, transforming our images of reality and the future, vindicates Schelling's earlier claims that our symbolic mode of 'worlding' creates a materially positivistic idea of progress. And our modern repurposing of art has produced what Polak calls a disorienting 'false and deluded realism' partly responsible for the counter-utopian, post-humanist tendencies prevalent today in both the East and West.

**KEYWORDS:** Aesthetics; Art; Expressionism; Future; Idealism; Image; Impressionism; Metaphor; Modern Mythology; Symbolic Realism; Utopia

### ~ Introduction ~

"Art can only flourish as a moving dynamic if it is moved by the tension between the poles of idea and reality."<sup>1</sup>

Fred Polak (1907-1985)

'Modernity', as Alasdair MacIntyre writes, is not a period but an ideology whose idea of 'being' is a disposition of one's mind toward the world in which only

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Polak, *The Image of the Future*, translated and abridged by Elise Boulding, (Amsterdam, London, New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1973), p.281.

syllogistic reasoning can account for it.<sup>2</sup> According to the mid-twentieth century futurologist Fred Polak, this notion can only produce *counter*-utopian forward movement because it fixes 'being' in the present. F. W. Schelling claimed this 'modern mythology' gripped the western world via a complete reversal, spurred on by Christianity, of the way ancient Greek mythology 'worlded' reality. MacIntyre argues leaning forward like this into the world renders the imagination and intellect focused on deciphering what is important to attend to from what is not based on choices that have now become completely disconnected from accumulated experience of balancing various natural polarities (eg., predictability and unpredictability, or necessity and freedom).

As Aristotle suggests in the *Ethics*, with the above disposition of mind becoming habitual, we begin to unquestionably over time confuse 'internal goods' (possessing ends in themselves) with 'external goods' which are only *means* to ends, and though indispensable, are far less important for a happy, fulfilled and fulfilling life.<sup>3</sup> Max Scheler's philosophical anthropology reveals that, as bearers of *internal* value become limited, aesthetic privation occurs. And, because humans are metaphoric creatures, and *Art* and *the Person* are what C. S. Peirce called a 'perfect sign', this privation is followed in both ethics and logic, hence meaning.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Art and humanity's culturally co-determined joint meaning crisis arises from historically composing reality and habituating values in this mode of thinking.

The more we live *primarily* according to 'vital' and sensuous needs, the more values *given* as present in our lives function only within the confines of their *symbolic* realisation in all kinds of human endeavour.<sup>5</sup> When there are limited bearers of aesthetic value, our *instinctive* attention to essential goods (eg., clean air and water) wanes in favour of *symbolic* normativity because subjectivity arises out of their original value. The 'normality' of freedom to profit from ecologically

<sup>2</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> 'External goods' (eg., income, shelter, etc.) reside on a scale of necessity; 'internal goods', like virtues (or Art, which is hence '*purposeless*'), are pursued for their own sake (Aristotle 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Art and the Person are both bearers of both Nature and History interconnected. Note, capitals below are used to refer to 'the ideal' whereas lower case indicate 'the real'. 'Art' capitalised = 'art as principle'. Lower case = 'art' categorically as a whole, or the 'art object' (i.e., 'artwork'). 'Object' refers to 'Art'/'the Person'; 'object' to its related artwork (or intentional proposition); 'Person'/'person' = humanity/individual, etc.

<sup>5</sup> Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Richard L. Funk, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p.267-268.

destructive activities and maintain the symbols of progress, though unrealistic, overshadow the necessity of collective survival. Our modernity long ago lost this Freedom-Necessity focal balance, edging us now dangerously toward various irreversible sustainability tipping points of the kind most civilisation collapses experienced.<sup>6</sup> Losing this natural comportment toward normativity means appetites and aversions (lower order 'vital'/'biological'/'human' values) can easily take charge of artistic or even religious expression. Polak, like Schelling, argues a weakening of both 'religious' and 'aesthetic' emotion originated in 'the same life sapping forces of cultural dynamics' in which this modern mythology grew.<sup>7</sup>

As a world of ideas expressed in acts, Schelling argues Christianity's archetypes developed into hierarchies which demanded that human beings themselves (rather than Nature) become *the symbol* of the realm of ideas. Despite the pro-social aspects inherent in this 'revealed religion', its *ideological* precepts demanded that art and humans become 'historical'.<sup>8</sup> Subsequent *historical* mythologising of art corrupted its unified principle; and, of 'the person', created the 'emotivist self' (a shift from collectivist to individualist valuing). This, as MacIntyre argues, during the 'failed Enlightenment project', produced an ideological form of worlding that repurposed the democratic civic humanism of antiquity, and reduced moral philosophy to 'emotivism'.

Human 'progress', the conflicted individual-collective relation, and the principle of Art's corruption, were hence all *conditioned* similarly to the different kind of attention which the artwork of later modernity and 'postmodernity' demanded. This is quite different to Art's original claim on us, via *the Person*. Schelling here, comparing the ancient mythology with ours, reveals the phenomenological aesthetic, ethical, and logical causality produced in both artwork and society - evidencing the fragmenting tendency of this new 'modern'

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph A. Tainter, *The Collapse of Complex Societies*, (Cambridge U.P., 1988), 152-178. Eg., in the Mayan downfall, symbolic idealism induced overextension driven by elite demands for 'monumental construction' associated with sacrificial worship, brought about famine, internal conflict, then invasion (p. 166).

<sup>7</sup> Polak, *IF*, p. 275. Though these 'emotions' are not equated and 'in certain respects antithetical'.

<sup>8</sup> Schelling called ancient mythology 'real' as opposed to 'revealed' religion. Modern religions like Christianity obscure 'the mystery' inwardly in the individual, only to be able to reveal it publicly through symbolism. The Greeks did not think of 'gods' in the same way, rather as 'ideas', hence their real religion is 'civic humanism' (Segovia 2021).

disposition of mind:<sup>9</sup>

Among a people whose poesy is characterized by limitation and finiteness, mythology and religion are matters of the collectivity itself. The individual is able to constitute itself in a collective fashion and genuinely become one with that larger whole. In contrast, wherever the infinite or the universal predominates, the individual can never simultaneously become the collectivity itself; he is rather the negation of the larger group.

Art – our most potent way of expanding the imagination, via *natural* worlding - is thus an ‘internal good’ whose indispensability has been misunderstood. Mainly for its collectivising ability, if realigned with normative aesthetics, to balance freedom and necessity (the poles of idea and reality). As an ‘external good’ (ie., of *means*) it can only be a commodity of sorts.

Therefore, as Aristotle argued, pursuing Art for politics, commerce, or play - any activity at all for which it is either a means or perceived end – neglects the fact that art *needs for nothing* except to be an end-in-itself for the contemplative life. Neither moralising (or ‘philosophising’) nor the ‘life of piety’ nor the singular pursuit of any individual virtue, can be ends for Art. Art does not *pursue* virtue, virtues *exist* in art. Its greatest use to humanity is in, over time, producing *right thinking*. This highest virtue of contemplation is the only pursuit in which ‘self-love’, says Aristotle, has meaning.<sup>10</sup> It is clearly, then, pursuit of art’s *meaning-value* which most benefits humanity. Since this empowers its *true* collectivising purpose: realistic, grounded, utopian mythologising. Realising this is the first step in realigning contemporary art with genuine humanism.

Schelling’s claim art early in the modern mythology became driven by ‘symbolic idealism’ re-emerges in Fred Polak’s prescient assessment of its defuturising tendencies in later Modernism. Today’s penultimate apotheosis of Art’s disjuncture from nature, society, and the normative sciences, chronicled by those like Andrew Bowie and Raymond Williams, was manufactured by a purely symbolic orientation toward mediating ‘the ideal’ and ‘the real’. This began in

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<sup>9</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art. Volume 58 Theory and History of Literature*, Edited, translated and introduced by Douglas W Stott. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p.69. The only ‘totalising’ mythology in modernity was primarily constructed under Christianity (which confirmed ‘reality’ to be a *part* of the past). Though not universal, it provided the *template* for how to manage the creation of a poesy ‘for the entire species’ generated from the material of our whole history. It thus remains the *historical* focal point of art’s canon. What we need is a new *cosmological* one.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, *NE*, p.201.

antiquity with mythologising art's inherent command over 'the realm of the senses', blurring some fundamental distinctions that would later cause its decline (via post-Kantian aesthetic theorising). After the middle-ages, as 'modern' reals and ideals became more ideologised (eg., in the nominalist/realist debate: Prawat 2003), *political* divisions emerged in how we approach the relation between *implicit* and *explicit* meanings. Not just in art, but the mythologising of beauty and truth in all human endeavours. With Enlightenment science and religious dominance, *symbolic* mediation of these 'real/ideal' poles grew in the absence of *prudent* judgement regarding the natural tensions between *Freedom* vs *Necessity* upon which both rely.

By the twentieth century (in the West), as Polak argues, this manifested in the emergence of various forms of Expressionism *from* Impressionism. And the modern crisis in art's meaning-value ('quarantining' art much earlier in history from *morality*), was further reinforced by humanity's loss of a meaningful telos, and vice versa.<sup>11</sup> Both obscured by syllogistic reasoning and the changing images of reality and the future that our evolving modern ideology demanded. The result, in MacIntyre's words, sums up the real challenge humanity still faces: developing a proper internal narrative order of 'goods'.<sup>12</sup>

It is not just that we live too much by a variety and multiplicity of fragmented concepts; it is that these are used at one and the same time to express rival and incompatible social ideals and policies and to furnish us with a pluralist political rhetoric whose function is to conceal the depth of our conflicts.

## 1. IMAGES OF REALITY AND THE FUTURE

Modernist developments like that from 'idealism' to 'new realism' prompted by twentieth century artists like Salvador Dali, might have *appeared* to reveal an 'unknowable reality', but the truth is they did nothing of the sort. They only produced more false certainties, reducing 'utopia' to an illusory 'de-futurising' implicitness. Outlining their underlying influences below will reveal why what Schelling earlier recognised as the modern mythology's *symbolic* 'idealism' remains a contemporary malady.

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<sup>11</sup> This is because aesthetics governs both ethics and logic Nat Trimarchi, "The Aesthetics of Meaning," *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* (2022). 18(2), 251–304, p.290-292.

<sup>12</sup> MacIntyre, *AV*, p.253.

Surrealism for instance, whose influence endures in postmodernism, originally seemed to be a justified search for ‘the idea behind observable reality’, according to Fred Polak. A genuine ‘protest movement against mechanization and... misrepresentations of truth as it is experienced by the conscious mind’.<sup>13</sup> But in fact, it merely adjusted the polar tensions between idea and reality for an anti-utopian self-fulfilling future image of humanity. While in the final analysis surrealism ‘remains in the framework of the here-and-now’, it is a ‘sham maneuver’ (sic), says Polak, whose alluring idea is an illusion:<sup>14</sup>

Where does surrealism look for the hidden idea which underlies reality? In the unconscious and subconscious of an unreal and irrational dreamworld, in a Nietzschean will to power.

It still portrays the same ‘reality’ of a fantasised world; the ‘same insane world which was first consciously observed’, returning ‘at a gallop via the subconscious’. Which widespread psychologising of art then encouraged.

Recognising that reality is neither just the ‘here-and-now’, nor what appears explicit in the subject-object relation, brings us closer to understanding why art (‘the science of ideals’ as Peirce named it) *ideally* orients us towards a realistically utopian future. Via portrayals of ‘the real’ which Schelling argued are ‘more real than reality’. The primacy of metaphor in art, distinguishable from ‘concept’, is significant for this reason.

Metaphor, itself a multidimensional ‘polyphonic’ narrative, provides the space-time movement needed to extend consciousness beyond the boundary conditions of probability. Hence narrative and metaphor are related ‘actantial’ *ontological properties* of Art ‘as principle’. The morphogenic tensions in the polarity of ‘idea’ and ‘reality’ are manifest in these properties, as revealed by Schelling, Polak, Paul Ricoeur, Rudolph Arnheim, and many others since Aristotle.<sup>15</sup> Any form of ‘explication’ however – regardless of how novel and seemingly *surreally* ‘real’ - neutralises these by introducing dissonance in the implicitly intuited polar relations.

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<sup>13</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.281.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.281.

<sup>15</sup> Schelling recognised there is an underlying activity in the cosmos (later characterized as ‘energy’) which develops by being limited. Its unit of ‘being’ is an ‘actant’ which accounts for the emergence of space and time, inanimate matter (opposing forces), and hence the creation of ‘forms’ interacting with *Umwelts* (worlds).

Without being explicit, how does great art *simultaneously* produce images of reality and the future? Polak's account of the 'sociology of art' draws parallels between various historical developments in art and culture, to reveal why it is the 'dualistic structure of the human mind' where Art originates. All genuine artistic expression emerges in the 'capability for a splitting of space and time' between what happens causally (ie., in daily life) and 'the Other' realm (the unknown, and unknown causality). Hence, '[t]he split and torn man, and no other, is able to conceive of another reality than the present'.<sup>16</sup> But by the same token, this capability forces culture to become gradually 'differentiated from nature'. Culture is that means by which humans construct their own future (ie., *ends*).

But *how* we construct it is key to *real*-ising it. Though Polak mistakenly attributes to Aristotle the notion that art *imitates* nature (life), rather than 'models' its complexity, he concludes rightly that: 'This Other is the medium through which art places its world of semblance opposite the world of actual existence'.<sup>17</sup> This 'oppositional' tension is key to all creation both in Nature *and* Art. But we can distinguish its productivity in Art as 'discovery' (identical). What Polak calls art's unique 'stamp on the representation of an Other reality' is nevertheless in fact *non-representational*.<sup>18</sup> Why this is so requires brief explanation.

Firstly, this semiosis occurs *metaphorically* in the person-Person relation.<sup>19</sup> Via the coincidence of inward-outward observation an artist/aesthete possesses, in which (though all sentient organisms experience 'subject-object' relativities) it is *only in humans* that the *ontological* Nature-connected-to-History reality emerges. But our metaphoric consciousness of this requires both *intuition* and a means to process *Reason* through which, in Polak's terms, 'a positive point of view' is expressed that is both uniquely subjective and objective.

Importantly then, in this semiotic morphogenesis, contemplation and 'realisation' of the Other coincide in 'the organic fusion' of a concrete image - a 'being'

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<sup>16</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.270.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p.271.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle's 'mimesis' in the *Poetics* in fact accords with Schelling's notion that genuine art replicates *the semiotic process* of 'autopoiesis' - the 'subject-objectivation' merging the real and ideal; it does *not* 'mimic' natural forms themselves (ie., it is *in-forming* rather than a 'form-ism'). Theoretical 'naturalism' in modernism mistakes Aristotle's original meaning with 'realism' because of this confusion.

<sup>19</sup> As Schelling says, 'the particular form of *man* does not inhere within the absolute as a particular form. But rather as the one and undivided universe in the form of man'.

(which is never fully ‘concrete’). This ‘image’ is however not merely a ‘bridge between two worlds’; it *embodies intentionality* and possesses future movement. ‘Metaphor’ is a passing over a meaning threshold; thus, this image has a beginning, middle, and end. It is a *futurising* image, embodying reality in the (sometimes illusory) passage of Time.

Finally, because the Other is both the primary source and final goal of contemplation producing this ‘image’, art as Polak says ‘shuttles’ back and forth ‘between the two poles which in the deepest sense are one’. Its ‘forward-striving’ toward Reason is the only tension capable of *arresting* potential illusions which space-time can create. Thus, it produces a power capable of fusing individual and collective selfhood meaningfully. But it is discernible from what any ‘general aesthetic’ *Gestalt* achieves through empathic self-identification in common experience.

This *non-representational* transformation only occurs in art; by *transcending* Time (*‘space-time’*) and shedding its temporary ‘materiality’ (its ‘thingliness’) to become ultimately *more real*.

In great art, as Schelling’s *Philosophy of Art* shows, the purposeful rendering of a *present* reality is (purposelessly) elevated to an image ‘for all time’. In the process, there is an inversion of lower order meanings affording an artwork: object->Object, and us: person->Person forward movement. Without this Art-Person ‘perfect sign’ relation being operative in the intuition of essences, this movement does *not* occur. Metaphor is hence the main ontological and teleological defining feature of the unified principle of Art. And what Aristotle used to distinguish art from cultural artefact.<sup>20</sup>

Only this metaphoric ‘morphogenesis’ has the power to release a truly positive and ideal image of the future. Because, by releasing a ‘norm of self-unfolding activity’, this elevated ‘point of view’ offers the possibility of a genuinely new perspective. Perspective, in painting for instance (or any artform), as Polak notes, is not merely a technical means, but an end in itself containing a ‘prospect of a coming time’.<sup>21</sup> It is *phenomenologically* normative: ‘Bach’s Art of the Fugue brings this technique to its highest development in music. The transcending

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<sup>20</sup> (Author, 2022)

<sup>21</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.273.



function and the futuristic aspect are practically the same'.<sup>22</sup>

*This* is how the dynamics of art and culture are ideally linked, not by artificial means, but located in the images of the future they together produce. 'Hyper-realism', in cinema or photography for instance, does not convey implicitly real images of the world or the future. Rather it *expresses* 'surreal' images bound up in assumptions that have become embedded in modern culture, and ways of *reckoning* the future. Not only does what would become anti-art in the modern mythology reflect these 'culturally determined' concepts; it actively, explicitly, produces and promotes them.

## 2. LIMITING THE IMAGINATION: THE IMPLICIT AND EXPLICIT, THE REAL, AND METAPHORICAL

As Iain McGilchrist argues, what we understand as *explicit* reality is merely a boundary condition of the implicit with 'much of its vital meaning sheared off, narrowed down and finalised'.<sup>23</sup> 'The literal' he says, 'is not more real than the metaphorical, it is merely the limit case of the metaphorical in which the wealth of meaning is collapsed into a one-to-one correspondence, for a useful temporary purpose'. The key relation between temporality and meaningfulness is governed by a *perception* of 'fixity'-in-reality, which easily leads to misunderstanding the polarity of implicitness and explicitness in Art. *Belief*-related action value - in what William James' instrumentalist nominalism promoted as the most important aspect of the 'action-outcome' relativity (ie., 'meaning') - hence elevated experience-generated *subjectivist* conceptualising above how we intuit 'semiotic realism'.<sup>24</sup> Nominalism renders any potency of intuitable meaning subservient to interpretation/theorising which, of course, affects our judgement. It directs learning from individual experiences to general conceptualisations, formulating 'truth' in the passage of 'individuals' to 'universals'. Thus, the tendency to universalise when no universalities exist, or to particularise while disregarding relativity with the whole (ie., *symbolising*, or *fragmenting* meaning).

Complexity science has dispelled many myths about reality arising from such

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.274.

<sup>23</sup> Iain McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World. Volume I, The Ways to the Truth* (London: Perspectiva Press, 2021), p.8.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Prawat, "The Nominalism Versus Realism Debate: Towards a Philosophical Rather than a Political Resolution," *Educational Theory*, Vol. 53, no.3, Summer 2003, 275-311.

tendencies to misjudge natural *polarities* in phenomena like order/randomness, simplicity/complexity, etc., which have nevertheless infected modern art in various forms of ‘expressionism’. Art is *essentially* propositional. But Peirce’s pragmatic maxim insists that ‘the meaning or significance of a proposition... lies in the tangible outcomes with which it is associated.’<sup>25</sup> And because not just *any* proposition (without ‘ends’) can be admitted as serious or meaningful, neither can a concept on its own. A concept is merely *re-presentational*. For James experience was the *end*, but Peirce argued a proposition could remain open without necessarily circumventing any movement toward reason. James’ functional nominalism hence attributed *action itself* to the ultimate end governing any belief. This mistaken notion produced the modernist leaning toward ‘*experientialism*’ in Art, which is at odds with Peirce’s approach to phenomenology.<sup>26</sup> Though in its purest forms nominalism is roundly condemned today by scientists and philosophers alike, the rise of analytical philosophy allowed it to persist in the human sciences, degrading art in the process. Misappropriation of Kant’s doctrine of agreement eventually led art to become entirely conceptualised in custom-made pursuit of *post-humanist* ideals. Art’s *limit case* became ‘the real’ art of ‘postmodernity’.

Consider the parallel effects of related misconceptions on our value-ception, and the value-conditioning of both art and the Person.

Firstly, order, as McGilchrist argues, ‘is not a special case of randomness, but randomness merely the limit case of order, which is the universal norm’. Randomness is in fact ‘a theoretical concept that does not exist’; but in Nature, where complexity is the norm, it appears abundant. Modern artists/theorists seek in its illusoriness however, via arbitrariness and accidentality, an ‘otherworldliness’. But by relegating this *norm* to the super- or supra-sensible realm, they mythologise ‘the unknown’ (explicitly) in art’s ‘inexplicable mystical’ powers, while eschewing *Reason*. A fragmentary worlding becomes dominant; drawing, as Schelling says, ‘the particular into the universal’ - which is purely

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p.288.

<sup>26</sup> This is exacerbated by, for instance, Mark Johnson and George Lakoff’s very generalised approach to aesthetic experience (eg., *Metaphors We Live By*) which sometimes confuses proper metaphor with concept/symbol and cannot adequately explain art’s higher meaning. Their ‘experientialist theory’ of meaning, influenced by Dewey, fails to take account of Peirce’s radical empiricism and its advance on James’ phenomenology and Dewey’s early strong allegiance to the latter’s nominalism.

*symbolic*, and illusory.

Following Kant's reassignment of aesthetics from its normative origins, *symbolic* 'normativity' became enshrined as the new 'real' for both humanity and art. MacIntyre, Arran Gare, and others have examined a corresponding fragmentation in the 'grand narrative' of *the Person*: the dis-embodiment of selfhood in humanity casting *the Self* adrift after the Enlightenment.<sup>27</sup> This has manifested in the historical transition from humanism to posthumanism, and 'world' to 'worldlessness'.<sup>28</sup> Simultaneously, modern *theoretical* aesthetics developed in symbolic allegiance to 'science', with a cloaked irreverence for anything spiritual, unceremoniously jettisoning any genuinely natural normativity. The *metaphysics* by which we attend to 'the regularity' (or 'natural laws') governing the interactions between different phenomena was overtaken by scientism.

This changed how we understand 'knowing' *phenomenologically*. Simplicity, for instance - which the symbol or icon offers artists - is a common modern means by which both reality and our images of the future have been transformed. But, as McGilchrist says, simplicity is only 'a special case of complexity, achieved by cleaving off and disregarding almost all of the vast reality of that which surrounds whatever it is that we are for the moment modelling as simple'.<sup>29</sup> This form of nominalist expressiveness favouring the explicit (or the narrowed implicit) has however almost entirely displaced metaphor and polyphonic narrative in contemporary art, which instead offer *transparency* of meaning in their complexity. Metaphoric propositional complexity is revealed by studying the immediacy of our experience of phenomena in themselves, via how the disciplines of aesthetics, ethics, and logic govern the dyadic relations between phenomena and ends in the contents of any artwork.

A major problem faced by artists competing or complying with the demands of modernism and its reactionary benefactor postmodernism lies here. With reason banished, and only 'simple' ends to contemplate in artistic

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<sup>27</sup> Arran Gare, "The Grand Narrative of the Age of Re-Embodiments: Beyond Modernism and Postmodernism." *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, (2013). 9(1), 327–357; see also, Gare 2002.

<sup>28</sup> This becomes apparent in examining the 'part-whole problem' as a metaphor for human self-actualisation relative to human polity/ecology. 'Worldlessness' (*Weltlosigkeit*) is a term Heidegger used in a 1967 letter to Medard Boss describing 'that which is merely "present-at-hand"' (Segovia 2021).

<sup>29</sup> McGilchrist, *TM*, p.8.

production/appreciation, the *means* become everything (ultimately transforming art from an internal to external 'good'). Stripping it of the complexity of realistic possibility also inhibits production of any genuinely utopian image of the future. (The symbol then becomes the predominant means too of expressing *hope*). Novel meaning is instead forced to rely on a multiplicity of means, either resembling false ends or laying false claim to real ends. For example, the *deus ex machina* introduced by Aeschylus was put to some good use in modernity (ie., serious satire), but is mostly employed now in comic satire where any possibility it produces resides in fantasy. Hence, in cinema or painting, numerous contrivances now force us to attend to effects/affects more than any worthwhile contemplation on the human condition. The artwork is inevitably left expectantly contentless.

With seeking meaningfulness in complexity thwarted, artists are forced to return to the simplistic 'otherworldliness' of mystical fantasy making the field of imaginative possibility very narrow indeed. Whether expressing possibility or hope, the simplicity of *meaninglessness* both feeds and is fed by popular demand (where it has become the 'refuge of the many'). This is what essentially occurred when early twentieth century artists like Picasso returned to *Primitivism*, as did artists centuries earlier. Experimenting again with a questionable 'primitivist' ideal, they portrayed humanity in an abstracted way, somewhat more simplified and ordered than we *really* are (understandably, perhaps, trying to find order in the chaos of a war-ravaged world). But the new populism of the times transformed this toying with novelty into countless permutations of the very same idea. Over following generations, it was replicated *materially* in many artforms, consecrating a family tree of styles idealising 'realness' in much the same way (*arte-factually*) without any real *immaterial* gain in perspective.<sup>30</sup>

Polak argues the development of such expressionism, both in the East and West, as a countermovement to impressionism, 'only achieved a sophisticated fixation in a primitive past'.<sup>31</sup> But what does validating such symbolic perception of reality via prolonged contemplation do to our *sense* of it? Essentially, it *blurs* the boundaries between the implicit and explicit. Whereas the metaphoric

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<sup>30</sup> 'Materiality'/'immateriality' are used in parenthesis because they are inadequate, but convenient, terms for describing the nature of 'being' in Art (for which better language is used by Schelling and others - eg., 'presence', 'essence', 'potence', etc., but space prevents necessary explanation).

<sup>31</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.282. Aristotle too, in the *Ethics*, argues this fixation to be foolish.

transformative power of *genuine* art moves us forward *and* toward Reason, without relinquishing possibility.

As examination of Aristotle, Schelling, and Paul Ricoeur's work on metaphor shows, the above misplaced emphases in arts practice fundamentally result equally from the corruption over time of the meanings of allegory, metaphor, and symbolism, confusing poetic with speculative discourse.<sup>32</sup> Modern aesthetic theorists and artists for much of the twentieth century were thus prone to invest in the belief that only experiment and experiential accidentality offered 'transcendent' access to the 'suprasensible'. Re-investment in fantasy then laid exclusive claim on the modern imagination (or 'Phantasy', as the ancients called it, alluding to people who had lost their way).

Nevertheless, explicitness has its place, as long as it doesn't become the artist's main concern (or pretend to be implicit). Filmmakers like Ken Loach or Mike Leigh, champions of 'British Realism', argue they tell 'real stories' when in fact they are often merely re-presenting a 'social realism' which lacks the *implicit* vibrancy and expansive possibility of metaphoric reality.<sup>33</sup> Such films, lacking any real 'ends' (ie., *internal* purpose), tend to feel lifeless and rather depressing as a result. By contrast, Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, claimed as a great modernist example of 'cinematic realism' motivating these filmmakers' works, in fact does *not* employ the same limp 'realism' at all. It uses *metaphor*.

Schelling's system of art reveals the key difference here is that contemporary cinematic 'realists' adhere to a 'modern epic' misconception of Tragedy (and Comedy), while De Sica uses the (truly realistic) ancient epic mythological approach.<sup>34</sup> In the former there is no possibility of 'soul cleansing', because there is no 'final cause'. Any potential metaphoric reasoning is weakened because, lacking meaningful ends, essentially only allegoric, monophonic, plot-driven narratives must be employed to drive the protagonist's motivations toward some 'empirical-comprehensible necessity'. Hence, in most modern tragedies

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<sup>32</sup> See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*. (Routledge, 2003), p.321. Also, Schelling, *PA*, p.201-207.

<sup>33</sup> Eg., The Criterion Collection, <https://www.criterion.com/shop/collection/144-british-realism> accessed December 26, 2022.

<sup>34</sup> Whereas *ancient* epic narratives, driven by final causes, sought Reason reflexively and were objective; *modern* epic narratives refurbish our subjectivities reflectively in novel re-creations. The confused naturalism/realism relation in modern aesthetics is a function of this.

(following Shakespeare) the tragic hero is *necessarily* guilty of some transgression. The poet's motivation then consists in 'giving the protagonist merely a character of enormous breadth out of which nothing can emerge in an absolute fashion, and in which thus all possible motives can have free play'.

But a protagonist is weakened when made to appear 'the playground for external determining factors'. And, as Schelling insists, such a protagonist 'is not tragic'.<sup>35</sup> The 'sublimity' of tragedy lies in the *guiltless* guilty person accepting punishment voluntarily, since 'thereby alone does freedom transfigure itself into the highest identity with necessity'.<sup>36</sup> Genuine tragedy thus must involve the *ideal* of human courage and greatness of character as the subject and object of its content. Because it is 'the reconciliation and harmony residing in that tragedy' which leaves our souls cleansed, by virtue of the fact this does *not* devastate us.<sup>37</sup> Art at its greatest then, even in Tragedies, is always *futurising* and never anti-utopian, because of its search for this balance in *the Person* – which requires forward motion, and therefore meaningful ends.

In antiquity, fate took on an objective epic sensibility. The early Greeks and their 'gods' were all *in the world* together; hence their worlding of reality was portrayed in the highest identity (metaphorically), in a united world view. A feeling of tragedy is therefore absent in any *truly* epic narrative. The Homeric epic falls between the lyric poem and Tragedy. Where on the one hand 'simple conflict between the infinite and the finite predominates' and there is confusion between freedom and necessity; but on the other 'both the conflict and fate are simultaneously portrayed'.<sup>38</sup> There is hence no rebellion against fate; Homer's heroes exhibit no internal opposition to it. Destiny does not appear as fate, but 'in the mildness of a quiet necessity'.

The basis for all modern drama however - the romantic-epic, evolving from our reversed mythological worlding (of the particular into the universal) - eradicated fate, replacing it with subjectivity and indomitable personality. The element of morality is inevitably treated symbolically. It cannot be suspended for contemplation, because without meaningful ends any great transgression against

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<sup>35</sup> Schelling, *PA*, p.256

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, p.255

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p.254

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.213

*the Person* can rarely be fully realised.<sup>39</sup> Using Hollywood movie formulas (and plotting devices like the ‘MacGuffin’), ‘morals’ are essentially made a mockery of, with fate commonly portrayed as meaningless.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, what Loach or Leigh’s so-called ‘cinematic realism’ elevates instead of the real, indeterminate complexity of we metaphoric creatures, is the mundane (simply *mimicking* human ‘nature’). In either genre, the implicit/explicit polarity becomes an expressionist illusion, mistaking the *real* ‘torn world’ of otherness with infractions of the personal ego.

*Realistic* artistic intentionality, in any artform, hence achieves balance always as an orientation toward a meaningful utopian worlding. George Orwell’s so-called “anti-utopian” novels, for instance, underscore a utopian ideal. It is the indifference between this ideal and the real which drives the serious epic-satiric content forward here. Genuinely dystopian orientation in art is however *necessarily* nihilist because its intentionality *purposefully* creates dissonance in the balance our *reproductive imagination* seeks between freedom and necessity, by *favouring* one or the other (as ‘efficient’ cause). It is in such cases that human nature is often cast as *unnatural*. We should not confuse this nihilistic intent with the portrayal of ugliness which, as in ancient Greek art, in and of itself is simply the *ideal* of beauty in reverse (as negation).<sup>41</sup> Nihilistic ‘art’ is instead anti-utopian, specifically because of this transgression against *the Person*, portraying personhood as *ideally* the antithesis of courage and greatness of character. It is also thus anti-collectivist, anti-social and, under the terms prescribed by Schelling’s system, *anti-art*.

For ‘practical’ reasons, we tend in life to ignore the higher value and usefulness of the *indeterminacy* of ‘things’ to perceived reality. The efficacy of absence that we in fact intuit and take practical account of (like the deliberately

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p.257

<sup>40</sup> Meaningless plot devices like the ‘MacGuffin’ feature in modern storytelling (an object, device, or event used for character motivation, but reflects trivial or worthless meaning lying at the root of some story).

<sup>41</sup> Schelling, *PA*, p.40. The ‘ideals’ of ugliness are thus ‘included in the realm of the beautiful’. The clear intent of the ancients, taken up by many Renaissance painters, was of achieving ‘sense’ in *the merger* of the beauty ideal *with truth*, even when ugliness was the subject (eg., Caravaggio’s *David with the Head of Goliath*). Following Hegel, however, (taking up Kant’s ‘adherent beauty’ concept) this became confused by attempts to keep Beauty and Truth separate, causing some like Heidegger to concede ugliness in the art of modernity is rendered not only permissible but *necessary* (see Hammermeister 2002: 98-99).

missed note in a melody). For instance, regarding the becoming-being problem, we prefer to think inanimacy is the norm when it is merely the limit case of animacy. Other perceptions we take for granted are listed by McGilchrist below. Each, like those few sketched above, has a very real bearing on the limitations our mythology places on art:<sup>42</sup>

Potential is not simply all the things that never happened, a ghostly penumbra around the actual. The actual is the limit case of the potential, which is equally real; the one into which it collapses out of the many, as the particle is the collapse of a quantum field. (The particle is not more real than the field, rather it is a special case of the field, in which its field-like characteristics are at a minimum.) Similarly, the wholly determinate, where it exists, which it does not, would be the limit case of the indeterminate. Straight lines, in as much as they can be said to exist at all, do so as the limit case of curves, which constitute all the lines in nature (even space and the paths travelled in it are curved). Linearity is the limit case of non-linearity, and can be approximated only by taking ever narrower views of an infinitely complex picture. The discontinuous, in as much as it can be said to exist at all, is the limit case of the continuous, which is the norm. Total independence is an imaginary construct; the limit case of *interdependence*, which is universal. And the whole is shot through with purpose...

The only real world is the Natural world, where whole-ness becomes ‘final cause’. Implicitness is more useful for comprehending the reality of the human condition because only reality attended to as a unified whole for us is meaningful. We therefore need to develop our faculties of admiring the implicit, both to make realistic art and judgements *about* it. Schelling’s system of art is still useful today for distinguishing the ‘practical reason’ of explicitness from that of implicitness. To be properly attentive to the whole of life, as McGilchrist argues, does not mean that we can perceive everything that is there in the world, but engaging both ‘focused’ and ‘big picture’ modes of thinking at least gives us the opportunity to examine possibilities without descending into dogma and delusion. At its best, this reorienting toward Reason, is what art can do better than anything. But only if we can distinguish its reality from that of non-Art or anti-art.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> McGilchrist, *TM*, p.8-9.

<sup>43</sup> Both non-Art and anti-art manifest a regression toward narrower two-dimensional *schematic* (symbolic) meaning value. Non-Art includes ‘bad art’ which may still be categorizable as being *in pursuit* of the genuine art ‘*object*’ and is hence distinguishable from ‘anti-Art’ which deliberately pursues lower-order meaning. (See Author 2022 for more on the intentionality of these distinctions).



As Polak says, art is ‘at once the crystallization of a developing culture and the chrysalis of a coming culture’, therefore ‘[n]ot only is degenerate art the fruit of a culture in decline, but it engenders further decay’. A ‘defuturizing’ art is ‘an important causal factor in the threatening decline of a dehumanised, futureless culture’. But the cycle may be broken by artists ‘whose work is charged with a positive [metaphor] concerning the future’, and a public capable of appreciating this, ‘staunchly refusing to let Stravinsky dwarf Bach or Picasso overshadow Rembrandt’.<sup>44</sup>

Such discernments are not about taste, but reason. About the subversion of purpose in our changing perspectives of art ‘as *principle*’, and subsequently abandoning ‘ends’ in the construction of the *artwork* itself. This becomes quickly apparent in the different ways ‘protestations’ may be made (which art, as we will see, does naturally, *implicitly*).

Nobody understands better than popular song writers like Bob Dylan that for a ‘didactic poem’ to capture human spirit and imagination requires more than purposeful protest and topicality. One might as well, he says, ‘write about the periodic table of elements with built-in rhymes about calcium, chromium and lithium’; whereas the ‘true to life’ song tells things ‘how they really are’ without resorting to this.<sup>45</sup> Yet proof that ‘efficient cause’ overtook the music industry lies in the fact that artfully balancing the explicit vs implicit is usually overshadowed by either blandly ‘singing the phonebook’ or obscure affectation. In our epoch, as others, institutional ‘classicism’ translates easily into either idealising ‘irreality’ or sanitising the raw life of real reality. Without ‘dynamic tension’, says Dylan, so much modern music becomes ‘either joyless proselytizing or empty-headed carousing... [marginalising its meaningfulness while]... bean counters constantly recalibrate the risk-to-reward ratio of public taste’.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.283. Note ‘Symbolic’ is commonly used archaically by Schelling, Polak, and others to mean ‘metaphoric’. To avoid confusion, I have replaced ‘symbolic’ with ‘(metaphoric)’ in the author’s text.

<sup>45</sup> Bob Dylan, *The Philosophy of Modern Song*. (Simon and Schuster, 2022), p.78. Dylan’s ‘philosophising’ belies his support for commercial, populist exploitation of music, but his penchant for ‘the implicit’ must be admitted. In fact, as Schelling notes, there are few if any examples where the didactic poem can be art. Most modern protest songs can be separated *phenomenologically* from the likes of Billie Holiday’s *Strange Fruit* (a rendering of Abel Meeropol’s poem), for instance, because of how it involves the ‘special knowledge’ involving the person-Person relation which Schelling stipulates (ie., and clearly it is proper metaphor which elevates it).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p.82.

As reality becomes fixed in the present, art drowns in ‘efficient causes’. In all ‘modernities’, art’s degradation is relative to the values of the epoch but manifests in much the same way in each.<sup>47</sup> The explicit triumphs over the implicit, and the metaphorical becomes ‘lexicalised’ and less objectively real.<sup>48</sup>

### 3. DE-FUTURISING ART: FROM IMPRESSIONISM TO EXPRESSIONISM

Fred Polak’s account of the subversion of our image of the future in every modernist art movement shows that (despite opposition) the ‘intuitive’ goodness of Impressionistic tendencies deteriorated into various forms of Expressionism which increasingly engendered ‘materiality’ and ‘mechanism’.<sup>49</sup> What appeared explicitly ‘real’ in the twentieth century came to dominate and suppress what was implicitly more real (not just in art, but other fields too). Polak’s exposure of these tendencies to negate reality, later spawning stronger reactionary ‘postmodernist’ fixations, reveal that it is the decline in art’s *meaning-value* which became normalised. Its potential to *orient* us toward a utopian future was overtaken by exploiting its talent for ‘moving’ us experientially.

The unfortunate direction expressionism took contributed to the common problems art and humanity now face. In Schelling’s time (‘early-modernism’), the ‘de-futurising of art’ was only in its relative infancy and characterizable as essentially the ‘denaturing of art’ (see Ruskin 2007). But by the mid-twentieth century (‘late-modernism’) attention oscillated between these impressionist/expressionist poles until arguably finally settling more virulently on his description of symbolic idealism.<sup>50</sup> Though Polak characterises this period as a turn to ‘realism’, it was by his own account a false and deluded ‘realism’.

He identifies three main undercurrents leading to artistic ‘Modernism’, noting how ‘metaphysical aesthetics’ was being superseded by ‘scientism’, from Schelling’s account to the present day. These capture the ‘vicious downward

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<sup>47</sup> Eg., the conversion of comedy to farce and the latter’s theatrical mass production as Athens declined parallels the symbolic debasement of Greek theatre to epic spectacle during Rome’s.

<sup>48</sup> Metaphoric lexicalisation ‘places the heuristic use of living metaphor in the service of conceptual formation’ (Ricoeur, *RM*, p.347).

<sup>49</sup> Eg., Picasso’s acclaimed *Guernica*, celebrating human spirit transcending war, nevertheless underscores the triumph of mechanism in its symbolic-expressionist construction.

<sup>50</sup> Earlier genuine artform innovations like jazz and cinema (before succumbing to commodification) show ‘the implicit’ struggling to flourish.

spiral' modern art experienced after an initial burst of renewal, as had occurred in earlier times (eg., 'post-classical' Athens). As Polak argues, it is mistakenly thought 'that the modern art of our day (wrongly but unavoidably considered as a whole) is basically different from the greater part of the modern art of previous ages'.<sup>51</sup> But, as noted, 'Modernity', is not a period.

What occurred was really a transition of 'normativity' in which as Polak claims art became *embedded* in the present. This trend gradually narrowed its focus, rendering artists incapable of re-creating a genuinely positive 'vocabulary of images' for the future, as had been achieved through great originality during the early Florentine Renaissance. Together the three undercurrents described below produced a reversal of 'idealism to realism' which he argues 'banished metaphoric representation, forbidding its 'revelation in meaningful compositions'. This was despite the ability of some artists to resist 'even the strongest time-bound trappings... [giving]... shape to the shapeless, to make the crudest material immaterial' (as Schelling argues Dante had uniquely done).<sup>52</sup>

The key turning points were 'the transition in art from idealism to all kinds of manifestations of realism, the introduction of various iconoclastic procedures, and the development of expressionism as a countermovement to impressionism'.<sup>53</sup> The turn of artistic focus onto 'the highest actuality', heralded by existential philosophers like Sartre, was in fact a deepening of Schelling's 'symbolic idealism', which becomes apparent in Polak's descriptions. The general shift from 'Idealism' to the 'New Realism' produced many of the fragmentary movements we commonly associate with mid-modernism (outlined below) which, as he says, amount to 'copy-art' diluting Art's 'inner' metaphoric to 'a photographic snapshot'. Though Schelling earlier identified this tendency, the 'tension between the poles of idea and reality' was now subject to additional pressures. Polak's other two key associated turning points fortified this transition.

Firstly, 'Iconoclasm', by shunning metaphor in favour of a radical 'voiding of the intrinsic meaning of the image of art', replaced Art's morphogenesis with symbolic two-dimensionality. This turned Design and Craft (which alone are *not*

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<sup>51</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.275.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p.280. Dante, despite being 'historical' was as Schelling says still able to render the 'ultimate indifference between intention and necessity'.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p.280-281.

art) into the ‘expressionistic’ functionaries of a more refined modernist symbolic idealism:<sup>54</sup>

All the expressive imagery by means of which the Other can be... [metaphorically]... revealed is radically rejected: harmony, melody, symmetry, perspective, and color. The new artistic image is atonal, abstract, or functional. All this is done in the name of the idea, reasonable *Sachlichkeit*.

Industrial design, like abstract art says Polak, makes believe there is deeper meaning in some hyper-specialised examination of ‘a series of horizontal and vertical lines and black-and-white planes, imageless images, without inspiration and without communication.’ (Christopher Alexander and Tony Fry are among others today like Polak who disagree).

Secondly, ‘New Primitivism’ signalled sensory impressionism’s ‘revolutionary countershift towards expressionism’. It attempted to ‘go back to older values by leaping forward’, but only succeeded in producing a flawed ‘futurism’ which ultimately set in motion its counterpart: ‘archaism’. Futurism produced dismal outcomes, according to Polak, prone to the kind of political imbroglio common today in posthumanist ‘art’.<sup>55</sup> That delusional “foresight” engendered the same archetypal problems Schelling earlier found.<sup>56</sup>

Again we find self-deception! For this primitive image of the world was seen through the sharply focused lens of the modern world. The willful abandonment of perspective and the quasi-naïve representation on a two-dimensional plane, without the enriching matrix of living inspiration which the fine art of so-called primitive people always had, can only produce a pseudoprimitive, contentless art.

Polak also foresaw the beginnings of the same negative changes occurring globally, though in different ways. With the East tending to ‘the more scientific and technological approach of the West’, and the West making a ‘conscious shift to unconscious primitivism’ traditionally thought the hallmark of Eastern

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p.281.

<sup>55</sup> See Bucci 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.282.

cultures. A global arts market now homogenises the traditional polarities (which Polak credits F. S. C. Northrop for identifying): Eastern cultures once based on ‘an aesthetically intuitive approach to knowledge’, and Western culture ‘on an intellectual, theoretically systematic approach’.<sup>57</sup> Today, whatever East-West *material* differences remain, they share ever-specialising attention to the ‘materiality of life’ governed by the Nietzschean will-to-power via a more virulent form of symbolic idealism fuelled by global corporatism.

To understand why expressionism in art generally became a force for ‘counterutopianism’ and posthumanism, consider firstly Polak’s thoughts on poetry. As many have argued, poetry is really ‘the art of arts’ because it is at the same time ‘invisible and impalpable’ yet its *mode* of address is ‘explication’. Polak says it is that form which is ‘most spiritualized in the sense that it expresses itself without the use of any material or instrument, but addresses itself directly to the human imagination. It literally speaks in images, [metaphors], and meanings’.<sup>58</sup> Of course, as a literal form its ‘instrument’ is language, but it manages to *bridge* the explicit and implicit – which all great art does in any artform - because its ‘language’ is the language of all art (drawing, sculpting, dancing, etc.; the best literature too being ‘poetic’).

Put simply, poetry brings us to the ‘immaterial’ as all ‘material’ art should. ‘Modern poetry’, says Polak, ‘has the same spiritual root and wells up out of the same split human mind as the utopia’. But, like all other forms in the early twentieth century, it too passed through ‘the international currents of surrealism and expressionism’.<sup>59</sup> Though Impressionism is mostly considered one of the major developments in *painting*, it involves those very ‘implicit’ modes of attention and perception attributable to poetry and *all* art. In Polak’s words, it ‘concentrates on quasi-photographic instantaneous exposures, on the capture of the figurative moment’.<sup>60</sup> It thus superbly employs an *apparent* dualism strongly characteristic of the ‘split mind’s’ potential for transformation (while simultaneously of course being prone to descending into deluded ‘fixity’).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.282.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.284.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p.284.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.276.

<sup>61</sup> Polak’s thesis that the ‘split mind’ *creates* the Other and is hence *necessary* for any utopian ‘vision’ corresponds with McGilchrist’s (ie., *counter*-utopian image-making occurs via narrowed LH focus).



Claude Monet (1840–1926)  
Sample of *Water Lilies (The Clouds)* <sup>62</sup>

The problem of this knife-edge intentionality surfaces in the fact impressionism's development as an artform style in painting, as Polak says, 'is one from the imaginary to the purely sensory, from the visionary to the merely visual'. This is because painting is heavily reliant on the eye, and hence what we commonly understand as 'perception' (though, of course, we really perceive with *all* our senses *and* what Peirce called 'abductive' or 'retroductive' *intuition*). Thus, the usurping of impressionism by expressionism in painting triggered the same tendency in all artforms, including poetry, to shift our attention and perception towards the 'eschatological'. What was genuinely artful in impressionism – the capacity to capture the moment - was subverted to a fixation on the moment producing an incapacity to capture the future. As Polak says: 'All art of the moment is in basic contrast to an art of the future, just as the transitory and the eternal are always in conflict'.<sup>63</sup>

This particular problem of attention, perception, and ultimately judgement, produced the vexing artistic misnomer: 'Realism'. Artistic intentionality shifted

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<sup>62</sup> From Monet's Water Lilies in Wikipedia, Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License 3.0; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water\\_Lilies\\_\(Monet\\_series\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_Lilies_(Monet_series)) accessed January 14, 2022. Monet is called the 'Father of Impressionism' with his painting *Impression - Sunrise* giving the movement its name, even though he was not the first to paint in such a way (eg., El Greco, 16<sup>th</sup> century).

<sup>63</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.276. This should not be confused with 'immanence' – art's capacity to immediately communicate essence via metaphor. Polak's claim rather reflects James' subjectivist nominalism locating experience entirely in the individual as transcendence 'in the moment'.

from trying to capture reality as a continuity, to *opposing* the transcendent, transformative, metaphoric qualities of life and meaning. In Polak's words, all manner of 'Realism', and the various forms of expressionism this produced '[w]hether or not it develops further into neorealism or surrealism... remains primarily oriented toward immanent reality'. By which he means art, in all artforms, becomes increasingly characterised by 'volatility' and 'lack of depth'. It becomes 'materialized', and its intentional meaning 'remains on the surface'.

Expressionism thus, in forging novel reversals of impressionism, turned to the other extreme: the explicit. But while attacking 'the purely sensory rendition of momentary impressions' and appearing to 'aim at the rehabilitation of the supersensible, the ideal image of the future', conflicts about the nature of 'appearance and reality' arose to thwart this development. Fundamentally, this was a conflict about 'freedom', and 'a violent shift took place in favour of the ideal content at the expense of the plastic form'. In other words, a purely *symbolic* 'idealism' overtook genuine attempts to intuit ideal *reality*.<sup>64</sup>

Generalizing about these two movements, it can be said that impressionism eliminates or curtails the future, and that expressionism eliminates or curtails the image; thus the image of the future was crushed between the hammer and anvil of movement in time.

From here the development of 'Modernism' and the further reactionary developments in 'Postmodernism' can be briefly summarised as variations on the same sorts of conflicts about 'appearance and reality' and 'idealism' versus 'realism'; essentially casting them as conceptual 'dualisms' (which Schelling rejected). These produced endless sources of *further* fragmentation of any unified principle of art via 'permanent revolution', with alternating 'protestations' in one direction or the other. Genuine art was undoubtedly still being made, because of course in the gaps between divisions real innovation still occurred. But judgement of art was driven into the theoretical. And modern aesthetics, seeking only sensuous 'agreement', settled for 'liberating subjectivity' – and disagreement.

Various 'schools' of expressionism developed in this apparent shift from 'Idealism' to 'Realism', under various labels: cubism, dadaism, divisionism, constructivism, futurism, archaism, surrealism, abstract and absolute art, and,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.276.

particularly in architecture the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. But any so-called ‘new objectivity’ only corrupted what was truly ‘immanent’ in reality. Which was *fundamental* to the *principle* of Art evident in impressionism’s original attempts to expand the imagination, by combining ‘momentary insight’ with ‘future imaging’. A sketch of Polak’s assessments of the ‘principle’-fragmenting artistic intentionalities driving each of these modernist movements and what became of them suffices here.<sup>65</sup>

Cubism expresses ‘the supersensual in the mathematical essence’, resulting in ‘an imitation not of nature but of science’. Dadaism ‘attempts a similar simplification (via) studied naïveté and primitivity’. Divisionism ‘based on the analysis of complementary colors’, light and shade etc., essentially reduces the image to pointillist, mosaic-like fragments – and is essentially Design, not art. Constructivism, as its title suggests, expresses design-driven mechanistic imagery – denatured, dehumanised, and ‘defuturized’ (welcoming a posthuman world).

Futurism, in its origins promising a positive image of the future, descended into childish optimism and ‘hysterical excess’ finally degenerating into fascist political nihilism. Archaism reverted to ‘primitivism’, with the ‘extreme of simplification and schematization’ of images becoming two-dimensional, perspective-less, childlike, wooden, or flat figures lacking any dynamism. Archaism merged with surrealism after developing into a ‘neonaturalism’ that, in attempting to paint nature as it ‘really’ was ‘without the varnish of civilization’, as Polak says, became ‘brutal’.

Abstract art, by abandoning all ties between space and time, rather than aiming for the irrational, achieves the ‘hyperrational’. It represents ‘the ultimate expression of the dehumanized and deified All-One’ in a purely symbolic ideal vision of deity as a void, using ‘colorless single plane (white and black), or in a single line or point’. All such ‘new objectivity’ makes ‘abstract essences’ into ‘hard, cold, and efficient’ images to suggest concreteness and the usurping of beauty with utility, ultimately applying a ‘logicality’ that Polak argues swallows

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.276-278. Each are, of course, mere categoric fragmentations of Art’s unified principle, just as in music or any other artform or so-called ‘innovation’ built on nominalism. The plastic arts, particularly painting, are chosen as illustrations by Polak because such trends are ‘most clearly differentiated there... nothing can throw a clearer light on the elimination of the functional essence of music and poetry than the banishment of spatio-temporal perspective from painting’ (p.283).



up the future ‘in the order of the day’. Schelling’s account of how to decide when architecture is art or not corresponds with all this.<sup>66</sup>

Long before Louis A. Sass or Iain McGilchrist’s research drew the connection between schizophrenia and these attentional tendencies evident in modernism, Polak notes this ‘striking resemblance... has frequently been pointed out’, and that these trends also ‘clearly culminate in negativism and nihilism.’<sup>67</sup>

The pessimism some modern art reflects in his analysis of the visual arts, as evident in literature as in all other artforms, Polak summarises as ‘the nonsensical’ (normalising meaninglessness), ‘the existential’ (‘forsaken by God’), ‘the perverse’ (a salacious obsession with ugliness, excess, and abnormality), ‘the demonic’ (‘*Satan conduit le bal*’), and ‘the negative’ (chaos, waste, death, damnation, and moral impotence). These express two binary reductionisms: the loss of an ideal image of ‘God’ and of ‘Man.’<sup>68</sup> And in the features they produce in artworks we recognise the sapping of life and meaning from the subject-object relation. The loss of perspective and ‘self-structuring’ structure, particularly, render the Object-object (*intentionality*) relationship both unnatural and disorienting at the same time.

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<sup>66</sup>Schelling, *PA*, p.172. Essentially, for architecture to be great art it must portray the purposiveness within itself ‘as an objective purposiveness... between concept and thing’, binding the subjective with the objective. This ‘objective identity’ only obtains originally from organism, but the *portrayal* of organism in architecture occurs inorganically. Architecture portrays the inorganic as an *allegory* of the organic. Hence the *meaning-value* of this form rises above concept as it approaches a metaphor of *the Person*. Unmediated by the *concept* of purpose, purpose now becomes a higher *end* or ‘final cause’. Schelling’s detailed account of how the fundamental features of architecture, in any culture or at any time in history, is explained by his categorical system based on natural philosophy (as opposed to aesthetic theory). Thus, ideas about line orientation, symmetry and so on, are all examined by means of corresponding reality in the natural world. Note his reference to ‘polarity’ – ie., the east-west or horizontal polarity versus vertical polarity in the realm of the organic (eg., both animals and plants) – which in turn are designated ‘real polarity’ (top to bottom, or vertical lines) and ‘ideal polarity’ (sidewise, or horizontal lines) correspond respectively to McGilchrist’s designation of left/right hemisphere lateralisation traits. The LH recognises horizontal lines (the ideal), while the RH pays attention to vertical lines (the real). Christopher Alexander’s *The Nature of Order* (2002-2005) offers a similar way of judging beauty in architecture (ie., what gives life to buildings) via natural generative human meaning.

<sup>67</sup> RH damage/LH dominance (evident in schizophrenia, autism, etc.,) also produce these attention/perception tendencies (Doidge 2007, McGilchrist 2010).

<sup>68</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.278.



In 2021 it was discovered that a painting by Mondrian had hung upside down for seventy-five years before being noticed (unsurprisingly, given it is merely Design).<sup>69</sup> ‘The possibility of turning a painting in any direction... without altering its message to the observer, is a popular subject for jokes’, says Polak, but we underestimate how *our* orientation in the world suffers an habitual ‘narrative’ loss of meaning on a deeper level.<sup>70</sup>

The deeper meaning is anything but funny. The deft obscuring of the distinction between above and below corresponds to that of existentialism with reference to the past and the future, which constantly meet in the now.

This loss is transferrable in several ways: ‘All former distinctions and positions have been overturned in the consciousness of our time. Life is approaching death. The supernatural is completely explicable in natural terms’, and so on. Moreover, we habitually turn away from the sense of awe genuine art induces toward essentially idealistic notions that what we attend to, perceive, and judge as ‘normal’ are simply ‘up to us’.

In the bigger picture, entire arts ‘movements’ influence our collective meaning orientation. Surrealism, for instance, normalises the subhuman portrayal of

<sup>69</sup> Oltermann 2022.

<sup>70</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.279.

humanity via the subconscious. It is, says Polak, ‘not superrealistic but infrarealistic’ in intention; carrying out the Nietzschean ‘task’ of the *Übermensch* ‘spiritually flayed, rendered lifeless, stripped of every shred of dignity – not only as a reality, but as an ideal.’<sup>71</sup>



*Ear on Arm Suspension* (Stelarc, 2012)<sup>72</sup>

Polak thus provides a bookend for Schelling’s account of Christianity’s reversal of the ancient mythology reflected in the artwork. Their archetypes were of a genuinely heroic character. Our modern ‘heroic’ idea of ‘suffering for art’, or artmaking as some feat of endurance or physical prowess (eg., ‘vocal gymnastics’ in singing), arises from universalising the particular. Just as all *revealed* religious mythologies do, eulogising the ‘magical’ and mystical. Modern art’s task is discarding the *humanistic* ‘Christbearer or lightbearer’ image of man, as Polak

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p.279.

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.pinterest.de/pin/273030796139500400/> accessed 6/07/2003. (Note ear grafted on left arm).

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suggests, ending our participation in ‘the most sublime activities of the human spirit, as a bearer of art’:<sup>73</sup>

Modern art is consistent and true to itself in launching a direct attack on... [upholding a]... tradition of future-oriented norms and values. It attacks the artistic values of the “beautiful and good,” the *kalos kaiagathos*; it attacks the roots and rules of humanistic-religious aesthetics.

In the end, ‘Decadent Art’ is really what became of modernism in postmodernism before merging completely with technoscience in the current posthumanist phase of its decline.

#### 4. CONCLUSION: PUSHING BACK ON THE WOES AHEAD

“For the modern poetry of our time it is the meaningless which provides the only natural and existential meaning. Conversely, the meaningful is unnatural and false. Honest art, according to this view, portrays reality as it basically is, reflected in man’s subconscious images and in the unchangeable conditions of existence: fear, suffering, and despair. In all the meaninglessness of the times which it glorifies, nothing finally appears as meaningless as its own rebellion, culminating in a sterile art which contemplates its own navel. This is the new freedom imagism has brought us. The sole meaning of the poetic image is now located in the one-dimensional present...”

*(The Image of the Future, p.285)*

We should put the de-futurising ‘pessimism’ Polak portrays in later modern art (particularly of poets) in context with his time. This is clearly a product of the first half of the twentieth century’s great social upheavals. But it has since blended with a certain blind optimism (a ‘coinciding opposite’ characteristic of the left hemisphere, according to McGilchrist), best described by Schelling’s term ‘symbolic idealism’ – a subversion of what the Romantic Idealists regarded as genuine idealising, but ultimately failed to defend. The ensuing dual Art-Humanity meaning crisis is easily dismissed by those pointing to technological advances, especially in the (largely superficial) connectivity afforded by ‘the information age’. Thus, in art’s possibly *final* decline, apparent in recent digital

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<sup>73</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.279.

‘virtualising’ developments (eg., “art” as non-fungible tokens, or NFTs), we have ‘progressed’ to a wilfully ignorant, self-delusory, ‘positivistic *immaterialist*’ materialism.<sup>74</sup> More covertly ideologically counter-utopian than ever.

Posthumanist “art” *embodies* the often muted, palpably impotent protestations of our times, as humanity approaches an existential crisis that only a genuine but elusive humanist totality can ameliorate. Since the *essence* of modern poetry originates in the ‘same split human mind as the utopia’, it is legitimately a protest expressing ‘the revolted spirit against all that is unjust, superficial, and hypocritical’. And indeed a protest against a society ‘wholly unworthy of man’. But its modern *mythologising* finds expression in ‘explicit rejection of all existing poetic forms and images’. As Polak says, *this* protest is not just ‘against rhyme, rhythm, and meter... ordered prosody, and melodious harmony; and... the coherent structure of a rationally or at least intuitively comprehensible whole’. It is against *sense* (Reason) itself.<sup>75</sup> Like any artform, poetry’s modes of expression cannot be thus so impaired ‘without seriously affecting the content’. Therefore, ‘the protest against the form of the poetic image [Art ‘as principle’] inevitably turns into a protest against its intrinsic meaning’.<sup>76</sup>

Is this the rabbit hole modern aesthetics sank into, and humanity followed?<sup>77</sup> Did this transform our image of the Person, the future, and art, into such a meaningless, contentless relation, that the meaning-value of art itself became irrelevant? If, besides advancing in techno-science, modern human culture has on the whole indeed stagnated, as it seems, what can be done? I suggest the only way to address this is to push back against symbolic idealism, beginning in arts practice itself.

As well as a perceptive defence of art’s greatest benefit to humanity – its meaning-value - Polak’s book, *The Image of the Future* (1953) delivers a farsighted critique of capitalism and the deepening failure of modern ‘socialism’ which

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<sup>74</sup> Stagnation of imagination via ‘Cultural and Creative Industries’ is arguably causing a crisis of *over*-production, with the ‘permanent revolution’ imperative now economic as well boredom induced. (See <https://www.google.com/amp/s/amp.abc.net.au/article/13220228>, accessed March 10, 2021 - *any* ‘merchandise’ at all is now billed in these ‘digital art’ industries as art).

<sup>75</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.284-285.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p.285. Brackets added.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Postmodern’ is commonly used to describe the reaction to ‘modernism’ and the failure of culture in this period. But (as Toumlin argues), this word can be reclaimed, since it can also be understood as entering the phase of ideas about nature and society superseding the Newtonian paradigm.

underscores Schelling's argument two centuries ago for 'a new mythology'. Unfortunately, contemporary theorists have bowdlerised Polak's insights; hurdling them with retroactive revisionist accounts.<sup>78</sup> But, like few others, he shows why reversing the poles of our modern mythology seems necessary for human survival. According to McGilchrist, this means re-engaging the right hemisphere (which genuine art is best placed to do).

Despite all the *good* various 'modernities' have produced, what becomes plain is that it is particularly pursuit of external goods, *necessarily* at the expense of crucial internal goods like *Art as principle*, that drains meaning from life. Without the latter, it appears unlikely any humane totalising futurising mythology can be created. Revolutions have patently failed, so it must be done gradually, organically. A genuine human *totality* presupposes the applicability of *personal* identity to three things: narrative, intelligibility, and accountability.<sup>79</sup> Any political system is fundamentally degraded by their erosion, producing dialectical relationships that are unresolvable (because nonsensical) and oppositions where none really exist.<sup>80</sup> Manipulative relationships, however, thrive.

Unless we can narrate a human telos meaningfully, no genuine common project, conviction, or possible harmonious totality can form. We may colonise other planets, but what for? Time is running out to answer this question meaningfully. As Polak says, one can't just recreate an old mythology or pull a new one out of a hat. The art of our times is not just a prophet of woe but is responsible for 'the woes which may come'. For, if it 'no longer creates for future generations will future generations be able to create art?'<sup>81</sup> And what will become of the imagination then?

All one is left with in such circumstances is the 'merely practicable'. Like restoring some clear directionality in judgments about art's meaningfulness, to help reverse the powerful embedded influences on our attention and perception steering the course ahead.

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<sup>78</sup> See Blauvelt 2020' also <https://walkerart.org/magazine/defuturing-the-image-of-the-future> accessed December 26, 2022.

<sup>79</sup> MacIntyre, *AV*, p.218.

<sup>80</sup> As well as what are in reality numerous 'belief-related' unnecessary territorial conflicts, add today's 'gender wars' and the Freedom vs Necessity polarisations confusing gender with sex (cf. Schelling's description of androgenous sculptures: Schelling, *PA*, p.191).

<sup>81</sup> Polak, *IF*, p.283.

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