

Art and Politics in the 20th Century

Plato expelled Homer and tragedy from his ideal *politeia*. Not because Homer or tragedy would be bad art: even with his low opinion of illusory function of poetic craftsmanship he had to admit that Homer and tragic poets were the best of the best, and apologised for his harsh treatment of great art. But it had to be done, because art, even at its best, is bad politics. The old fight between poets and philosophers mentioned by Plato was a political fight for the position of the best advisor in political decisions.

In the 20th Century Plato was not accused for his attack on arts only, but for totalitarianism as well. While such accusations are ridiculous anyway, because totalitarianism belongs to the 20th Century, it is true that in the Greek *polis* all aspects of public life were politics. No part of life in community was so special and separated from the others that it would not be involved with the common, the whole, and the universal of the community. Politics was not a special sphere among special and differentiated parts of community, a sphere which would be exclusively responsible for the functioning, law and order in the community. Politics was an aspect of all activities of the members of the community, as a space of freedom, i.e. a space of decision-making, while the space of *oikos* (family, private space) was a space of necessity¹. For Plato, art was bad politics because of its illusive and delusive character which cannot support freedom of decision as philosophy can.

The relations between art and politics in modernity are quite different. Clement Greenberg begins his famous essay "Modernist Painting"² from 1965 claiming that intensified self-criticism, starting from Immanuel Kant on, is the most important and typical characteristics of modernism. This criticism's aim is not to deconstruct different fields and disciplines. Through constant self-criticism, they become stronger in the field of their competence, while the demarcation lines between different fields and disciplines get more defined and certain. "Differentiation", the concept used by Scott Lash in his "Sociology of Postmodernism"³, could be another expression for this feature of the Western way of constructing safe havens of human Truth and Certainty. As modernist techniques used for building foundations of modernist progress, criticism and differentiation produce borders between different abilities and disciplines of human endeavour as spheres divided from one another, and thus autonomous. Any human ability or field of production which can not ascertain its own limitations, which can not introduce concepts of self-criticism as certain criteria for evaluation of its progress, and which can not institutionalise its special and autonomous function in the progress of humanity towards its perfection, is imperfect. In each special and autonomous field there has to be some common denominator which gives such a field enough power to build its own criteria for differentiation from all the other fields, and which masters all relations inside this demarcation line. So, this denominator is not just what all things and events of this field have in common. It is the representative of its, and their, sovereignty and autonomy.

Art is one of such sovereign fields fenced in and mastered by the aesthetic as representative of its sovereignty, and politics is another. It might be that art is not just about the aesthetic, and that quite a number of elements foreign to its nature enter into its domain, but only with and because of its aesthetic function art is special and autonomous human activity differentiated from all the other activities and abilities. This sovereign domination of pure aesthetics over art is one of the dominant characteristics of philosophy of art, but still just one component and current of the philosophical aesthetics⁴. Immanuel Kant is usually quoted as a source of such aesthetics, but

¹1. The relation between private and public, and between *polis* and *oikos*, as much as the differentiation between political and civil society, is analysed in Tonči Kuzmanić, *Ustvarjanje antipolitike* (Making of the Anti-Politics), ZPS, Ljubljana 1996

²2. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting", in : *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 4 - Modernism with a Vengeance. 1957-1969* (ed. by John O'Brian), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1993, pp. 85-93 (first lecture on Voice of America 1960, printed unrevised 1961, then in Art and Literature - Spring 1965); the beginning: "Modernism includes more than art and literature. By now it covers almost the whole of what is truly alive in our culture. It happens, however, to be very much of a historical novelty. Western civilization is not the first civilization to turn around and question its own foundations, but it is the one that has gone furthest in doing so. I identify Modernism with the intensification, almost exacerbation, of this self-critical tendency that began with the philosopher Kant. Because he was the first to criticize the means itself of criticism, I conceive of Kant as, the first real Modernist. The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence." (ibid., p. 85)

³3. Scott Lash, *Sociology of Postmodernism*, Routledge 1990, p. 5 ("It is the standard structural-functionalist idea of social modernization by the means of differentiation. But, following Weber's famous methodological essays on the sociology of religion and Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, I want to confine this differentiation and modernization to the realm of culture alone. What I want to claim is that if modernization is a process of cultural differentiation, or what German analysts call *Ausdifferenzierung*, then 'postmodernization' is a process of de-differentiation, or *Entdifferenzierung*.")

⁴4. Sometimes, all history of aesthetics from Baumgarten on is reduced to this kind of philosophical aesthetics, which is not true. All the other and different schools of thought are neglected, if we represent aesthetics of the 18th and 19th Century in such a way: empirical

the differentiated image of art as autonomous domain, and of an artwork as sovereign body politic prevailed only later. In art, Théophile Gautier's Preface to his "Mademoiselle du Maupin" marks the rupture between art and public world, politics included, while in the aesthetics the most autonomous and sovereign metaphor was provided by Theodor Lipps.

Théophile Gautier attacked two possible common denominators of art proposed in the 19th Century: morality and utility. Art and morality are two different fields, and for the judgement of the work of art criteria of morality are totally unsuitable. The work of art is not a vehicle of progress and civilisation. Utilitarian claims are wrong as well, because what is good for producing a work of art might be, and usually is completely useless for any other purpose. This uselessness is even the most important feature essential for the work of art: really beautiful is something which is not morally or in any other way usable, profitable or desirable. "The most useful place of a house are its latrines."⁵

Art should be free of any external demands, and of any extrinsic criteria for its evaluation. What, then, governs in this free and autonomous realm of the work of art, and does its creator have any obligation at all? Theodor Lipps believed that he discovered eternal natural principles of aesthetic apperception while he merely described modernist fascination with the aesthetic. For a psychologist philosopher, his ideas are pretty metaphysical: in aesthetic apperception he found a total subordination to the aesthetic, and this aesthetic is obviously not something sensual. In aesthetic apperception we deal with a kind of absolute monarchy, because all substantial parts of the apperception are totally subordinated to the aesthetic. Aesthetic apperception, as much as the work of art itself, function as close circuits through which the energy of the aesthetic overwhelm upon anything else present in the aesthetic experience.⁶ So, we do not just find out that art is a sovereign territory. We know what its constitutional structure is like: there is no democracy and equal rights between its different parts, they are composed into a unity ruled by a single monarch - the aesthetic Leviathan.

"Art" and "politics" is a relation seen in modernism as a dangerous touch between two autonomous realms with different regimes and different denominators. They might have something in common, but they still are - two different power structures founded on two different principles, with two different legislations, and with certain borders which cannot be trespassed without violent breaking of modernist rules. So, after this process of autonomisation of art which happened in the 19th Century⁷, it seems that when we put art and politics together, we have two different, separated, and autonomous fields of human activity. Even more, it seems that politics is somehow practical and mundane, while art represents transcendent and invisible worlds in our other, more terrestrial activities: it does not belong to this world, or not only. It can not surprise us that in the second part of the 19th Century there was a rumour about art as a substitute for religion and a cult of the secularised culture of modernism. But such views, not at all the only views expressed and sometimes even not dominant⁸, might be true of the 19th Century when autonomy of art was established, and when aesthetics became a philosophy of such an autonomy in both its appearances as speculative metaphysical school or as positivist, empiricist, or psychologist school. But even then art was politically engaged and important, in spite of its autonomy and with the help of it, especially in nation building movements.

The conflict between art and politics, or the conflict between art and politicised demands that art should serve moral and utilitarian political purposes, and at the same time conflict between art and market economy with similar utilitarian demands, stimulated artistic nourishment of autonomy. From this point of view, there were just two possibilities: retreat from politics into artistic isolation, or engagement in politics - from above, as neutral and objective moral arbiter, as Zola in the Dreyfuss case with his "J'accuse!"⁹. There were other artistic attitudes to politics, of course, and in a number of countries official patriotic realism flourished as much as unofficial national romanticism with those who still fought for their recognition and national sovereignty. But

aesthetics, psychological aesthetics, aesthetics as natural science, aesthetic Darwinism, aesthetics of positivism, and other, might be "metaphysical" as well, but they usually do not reduce art or artwork to their pure aesthetic dimension, quite the contrary.

⁵ Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin - Préface*, Flammarion (Select Collection No. 168), Paris, p. 12

⁶ Theodor Lipps, *Von der Form der Aesthetischen Apperception*, (Sonderabzug aus: Philosophische Abhandlungen, Gedenkschrift für Rudlof Haym) Max Niemeyer, Halle 1902; "Die Vollkommene monarchische Unterordnung bezeichnet die vollkommenste Einheit des Verschiedenem, die psychologisch möglich ist." (I.c., p. 372)

⁷ As demonstrated in Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1998

⁸ The programme for the arts written by Maxime Du Camp on the occasion of Universal Exhibition of 1855 in Paris testifies that voices against autonomy of art and against its utilitarian character. His proposal is to modernize art with its cooperation in building modernity together with engineers, in manner of new cathedrals (see Maxime Du Camp, "Les Beaux-Arts à l'Exposition universelle de 1855", *Historienmalerei* (Hrsg. Von Thomas W. Gaethgens and Uwe Flechner), Reiner Verlag, Berlin 1990, pp.337-342; "Je ne me suis pas arrêté une seule fois dans des gares de chemins de fer, ces cathédrales modernes de l'industrie et de la science, sans penser aux peintures dont on pourrait orner leurs murailles nues et désagréables à l'oeil." (ibid., p. 337)

⁹ "Histoire extraordinairement répétitive parce que le changement constant y revêt la forme d'un mouvement de balancier entre les deux attitudes possibles à l'égard de la politique, l'engagement et la retraite (cela au moins jusqu'au dépassement de l'opposition avec Zola et les dreyfusards)." - Pierre Bourdieu, *I.c.*, p. 548

the concept and institution of artistic autonomy was the prevailing artistic ideology, if not practice. The case of artistic patriotism-nationalism, an artistic position confirmed and cherished by artistic autonomists as well as by national politicians, is important because it proves that nationalist political positions were accepted as politically non-partisan and artistically autonomous, even natural. Nationalist politics of autonomous "Institution Art" is too often neglected and overlooked in aesthetic and sociological analysis of modern art.

That 20th Century brought, among other novelties, a mutiny of art and artists against the 19th century autonomy of art, and against Art as Institution, is well known. It is also well known that basically, the Institution of Art won over rebels and their art or anti-art. That is why Peter Bürger claimed that avant-garde is historical, and that is how Clement Greenberg discovered that avant-garde has become a mainstream activity: "a body of people and an area of activity that society at large accepted in an almost institutional way."¹⁰ So, what else is new? Well, what is really new is the destruction and deconstruction of the idea of artistic autonomy. And it has not been thrown out of vocabulary by artistic movements of the 20th Century which attacked artistic isolationism. It has become obsolete, together with the other romantic ideas about art because industry of culture embraced and included art and its institutions. With the autonomy of art monarchist absolutism of the aesthetic collapsed as well, and that is why at the beginning of the 21st Century, we have no hierarchy of arts and genres, styles and publics¹¹. In spite of all these cultural turn and change usually collected under a label "Post-Modernism", there is still much opposing to politics in art, and anti-political criticism of engaged art, while on the other side there are many purely political artworks or attractions¹². These criticism and other tensions between art and politics¹³ prove that something has changed in relations between art and politics between the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 21st, and that we can not grasp all the changes just from the art's end. We have to take politics as such into consideration, especially because, in spite of and against autonomy of art, the art of the 20th Century reconsidered its relations with politics, and has done so in many directions and in many quite scary and demanding political and artistic situations. There are at least three interesting features of the relation between art and aesthetics, and politics.

First, there is the development of political criteria, instead of criteria of taste, for evaluation of different artistic movements. This does not mean that political criteria were not already relevant before, but the prevailing artistic ideology of autonomy overruled their possible use as non-artistic and external to artistic criteria. And it does not mean that political criteria became a substitution for the older criteria of pure aesthetic taste. Political standards of art were used in the 19th Century even explicitly, as in the case of Henry Beyle - Stendhal who declared himself as moderate in purely political sense, but extremely liberal in artistic sense¹⁴. Romanticism, sometimes introduced as the last historic canon-style before the epoch of historical co-existence of different styles, or pluralism of stylistic possibilities of art, was already involved in political differentiation of art. On one side, it meant radical confrontation with "classicism" as art of the past which has to be abandoned as something belonging to the pre-Revolutionary past. On the other side, romanticism has been already divided along political lines in conservative (Chateaubriand), liberal (Victor Hugo) and extremist (poètes maudits) romanticism¹⁵. But the universal importance of political criteria for art emerged in the 20th Century with all its numerous faces. It might be true that in the long run, we have just one artistic value - goodness of good art¹⁶. The problem is that this becomes apparent only in the long run, and that even in the long run the idea about goodness in art is changing, as in case of the Gothic art, and in its changing at least sometimes even political criteria are involved. From abundant experiences and cases of the 20th Century, we may name only some. So-called Nazi-Kunst,

¹⁰10. Clement Greenberg, "Where is the Avant-Garde?" (first appearing in *Vogue*, June 1967), *The Collected Essays and Criticism. Vol. 4. Modernism with a Vengeance. 1957-1969*, p. 261

¹¹11. Pierre Bourdieu represented very graphically the stratification of literature at the end of the 19th Century, including "political" left-right relations, and the tension between "La Bohème" and "L'Académie". This kind of political relations and hierarchical stratification of art was still there in the 20th Century, but was losing its grip and collapsed in the 60ies. (Pierre Bourdieu, *l.c.*, p.207

¹²12. For a typical anti-political reaction, see JJ Charlesworth "Mayday! May Day!", *Art Monthly* No. 236 (May 2000), pp. 13-16, which begins with even more typical accusation based on Greenberg's above cited "victory of the avant-garde": "Social conscience and political engagement in art is back in the mainstream." (p. 13). His criticism put in the same context anti-WTO/anti-capitalist movements from Seattle to London, and politically engaged art/community art presented at Royal College of Art from April 14 to May 12 2000 under a title "democracy!".

¹³13. As in the U.S.A. where an unsolved controversy exploded at the beginning of the 90ies, with Andres Serrano work "Piss Christ" attacked in the Senate by Alfonse D'Amato, and Robert Mapplethorpe retrospective "The Perfect Moment!"; later, many other examples of obscene or politically incorrect art were pointed at, with well known "Sensation" exhibition which arrived in New York after being shown in London, and caused bitter and fanatic fights on both sides of the ocean. As freedom of artistic expression is usually successfully defended in courts, the political strategy against this kind of politically provocative art is to introduce special ideological rules for financing the arts, and special rules for artistic institution which could be eligible for getting public money.

¹⁴14. Stendhal, *Du romantisme dans les arts. Textes réunis et présentés par Juliusz Starzynski*, Hermann, Paris 1966, pp. 123-124

¹⁵15. Karel Teige, *Jarmark Uměni, Československý spisovatel*, Praha 1964, p. 46 (originally from 1936)

¹⁶16. Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties" (first as lecture on the Power Institute of Fine Arts, University of Sidney, Australia, 1969), *l.c.*, p.292: "Artistic value is one, not many. The only artistic value anybody has yet been able to point to satisfactorily in words is simply the goodness of good art. There are, of course, degrees of artistic goodness, but these are not differing values or kinds of value. Now this one and only value, in its varying degrees, is the first and supreme principle of artistic order."

institutionalised art of Nazi Germany, was introduced as opposition to modern "Entartete Kunst" - proverbial bad art. After the Second World War the evaluation changed radically, of course, and Abstract Expressionism, for instance, became good art, while Nazi-Kunst or anything remaking its popular realism and mythical blood-and-soil attitude was not just bad art. It was politically incorrect, for German artists even forbidden style¹⁷. In the 70's, some enthusiasts of historical memory had an idea that this forbidden art should be shown once again as a warning, and organised the exhibition. What happened astonished all followers of good modern taste: people enjoyed the exhibition very much, and found in it what they strived for in art for a long time, but could not get from contemporary art. They found the artworks of the Nazi-Kunst beautiful. Because they were Nazis, or because their taste for art was bad, or because they were politically uninformed? Whatever the answer, in spite of goodness of good art, until now nobody could find, especially after postmodernist "anything goes", any unique and eternal aesthetic or purely artistic criteria for calling Nazi-Kunst good or bad art. It is a political art which needs political and not just aesthetic criteria. Criteria which label Nazi-Kunst a bad art, these pure artistic criteria of modernism, with their criticism of realistic mimetics and its vulgarisation, have their own political charge, and this charged bias, invisible in the century before, became evident in the 20th Century. If Nazi-Kunst seems to be somehow illegal example, as much as socialist realism which is different if discussed as an artistic style¹⁸, we can mention the case from the other side, the movement of artists against fascism and nazism which would be much more important and successful if its main discussions would not be from the beginning to the end about politically correct style of artistic resistance. It was not enough to be against fascism and nazism to become a member of these Left Fronts of intellectuals and artists. Your art, and not just your political position, had to be anti-fascist, and this excluded *bourgeois realism* as well as *surrealism*, while expressionism, at that time of the thirties more or less non-existent, became a major reason for dispute between exiled German intellectuals¹⁹. What Klaus Mann, Alfred Kurella, Herwarth Walden, Béla Bálasz, Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Hans Eisler, Bert Brecht and many others had to say about this subject was and still is completely understandable from purely artistic or even aesthetic criteria; we need political criteria to understand what that was all about. Expressionism seemed to be, because of its style which is quite an aestheticist outburst of romanticism and despair, different from avant-garde progressist optimism and anti-aestheticism; on the other side, it was too radical with its distortions and ugliness to be accepted as a "fellow traveller" of socialist realism. The same political reason was involved when Peter Bürger accepted Italian Futurism and German Expressionism only as marginal and not really avant-garde movements²⁰. On the other side of the ocean, we have a case of completely invisible artistic difference between David Alfaro Siqueiros and Diego Rivera, as they both belong to the same movement of Muralism which was a political artistic movement in itself and from the beginning in 1922²¹. Still, in the Thirties the movement experienced a political struggle between artistic Leninism of Muralist movement and artistic Trockism of Rivera as seen from the position of Siqueiros, and/or as a struggle between artistic Bolshevism-Leninism of Muralist movement and artistic Stalinism of Siqueiros as seen from the position of Diego Rivera. Whatever the reasons and differences, they could be expressed and correctly understood only in the language of politics and its criteria, while in the language of pure aesthetics and autonomous art which was criticised and in most cases also abandoned by all these movements we can not even formulate the problem. There is no relationship between art and politics here - these kind of movements, groups, and artists say: "Good art promotes good politics, bad politics makes bad art."

¹⁷17. Arthur Danto, "Art After the End of Art", *The Wake of Art. Criticism, Philosophy, and the Ends of Taste*, G+B Arts Int., Amsterdam 1998, p.124-125

¹⁸18. Berthold Hinz did not want to deal with socialist realism in Soviet Union in his book on Nazi-Kunst, in spite of criticism: "The occasional similarities that do exist occur in the manner of presentation, in the marked focus on objects, but this is hardly sufficient evidence for assuming that these two styles are identical. Not only are the dominant modes of art in these two political systems different in origin, a key factor in distinguishing between them is their divergent attitudes toward reality. Two major themes of Soviet art, the truck driver and the female tractor driver, do not occur at all in the art of the Third Reich. In contrast, men appear almost exclusively in the role of the plowing, sowing, or resting farmer, and there are innumerable paintings of women as nudes - the National Socialist version of the American pinup girl - and as mothers. Whatever similarities occur in symbolism and in the repertoire of emblems are the result of an effort to disguise National Socialism as a form of socialism and to 'prove' this identity visually by means of copying and borrowing." (Berthold Hinz, *Art in the Third Reich*, Pantheon Books, New York 1979) - Here the idea of Nazi-Kunst as a style in itself, as much as the same idea of socialist realism, allows the differences to be seen, but all these differences are political differences of two ideologies, and the one and only similarity, introduced as a similarity of disguise, is from the same, entirely political origin. If the author, instead of the concept of style which excludes non-artistic material from the analysis, would reconsider also the way of functioning of the Nazi Institution of Art, and Soviet Institution of Art, he would find out the source of "stylistic" differences and similarities of both artistic movements of the 20th Century directly in political field to which both these "styles" belong and from which all their artistic shape depended upon (for Nazi-Kunst, the information about its political background and fundamental institutional organism, see Hildegard Brenner, *Die Kunstpolitik des Nationalsozialismus*, Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, Reink bei Hamburg, 1963).

¹⁹19. *Die Expressionismusebete. Materialien zu einer marxistischen Realismuskonzeption* (Hrsg. By Hans-Jürgen Schmitt), Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1973

²⁰20. Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1974, p. 44

²¹21. A Declaration of Social, Political and Aesthetic Principles of the members of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors of 1922, signed also by Rivera, Orozco, Charlot, Asunsolo, Guerrero, Ravueltas, Montenegro, Merida, and Siqueiros; see David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Art and Revolution*, London 1975, p. 24-25

Second, as already apparent with the first novelty, in the 20th Century artistic groups and movements appeared as artistic political groups, sometimes even artistic political parties. While group work and movement organising was not unheard of before 20th Century, this partisan politicisation of art is something new. That artists declared their art in political terms, and that their opponents were doing the same, so that political terms became artistic labels (German Art, Jewish Art, Decadent Art, Bourgeois Art, Proletkult, Socialist Realism, Nazi-Kunst...), needs no examples. Perhaps the last one of these politically founded labels is still interesting - Moderate Modernism as "fellow traveller" of the socialist art after Stalin's death and Chruszczow introduction of de-Stalinisation when socialism especially in countries with avant-garde and modernist traditions needed artistic legitimisation; this need emerged even before in Yugoslavia after its rupture with Stalin in 1948. In his "Soviet Marxism" from 1961, Herbert Marcuse already hinted that socialist realism as a "style" might not be the only kind of art without utopian aesthetic dimension (if we use his own terms for critical avant-garde art): "Within the general framework of the political controls over art, a wide range of policy modification is possible. Relaxation and tightening, alteration of artistic standards and styles, depend on the internal and international constellations. Naturally, with the transition from terrorist to normal modes of societal regimentation, the claim for more artistic freedom will be heard and perhaps fulfilled. The rigidity of 'Soviet realism' may well be loosened; realism and romanticism, in any case, have ceased to be opposites, and even 'formalistic' and 'abstract' elements may still become reconcilable with conformist enjoyment."²² These formalistic and abstract elements, together with abstract expressionist colourism, were introduced and allowed to flourish in different countries, with well known examples of Yugoslavia and Poland. This kind of modernism was deprived of avant-garde criticism and utopia, and served as a kind of legitimisation for socialist regimes. On the surface, it was just a kind of universal, apolitical modernism with its return to the autonomy of art; in concrete reality, it served a political cause, demonstrating that artistic freedom may exist even under socialist rule if, and only if, art is just aesthetic formalist realm. This kind of modernism has been larplartism possible under socialist control over artistic life. Its moderate character was not of artistic, but of political character - it was a modernist culture without teeth to bite. And as such, it has been directly criticised and negated by the postmodernist postsocialist art of the eighties²³.

More than just the appearance of political labels for artistic phenomena, the para-partisan organisation of the artistic groups and the use of political propaganda methods and means for the affirmation of their (anti)artistic ideas, attitudes and artworks is something novel, present from the avant-garde (anti)artistic practice on. It is the result of artistic activity with a cause which is unattainable through purely artistic or even aesthetic practice. The criticism of the institutional Art-World turns into a criticism of life itself, of its rational - irrational organisation and institutionalisation. Artistic para-partisan public appearances and actions, on the first sight, might be just the usual parody; but, on the second thought, they become a very serious political position in special circumstances, especially those of political revolutions and general absence of stable political institutions. Typical outcome is the fight between "purely" political power and this artistic partisan political activities which sometimes happily resolve themselves into the old modernist division between art and politics, while in some sad experiences artists and their art became victims of political power struggles.

That avant-garde artistic groups were something new as sociological, aesthetic and philosophical phenomenon, was stressed by Miklavž Prosenc in his study from 1967 on Dada movement which was concentrated on Zürich Dada²⁴. Of course, groups before the First World War already operated in para-party manner, with manifestos which were not just artistic statements but political partisanship at the same time. This was part of opposition to traditional autonomy and individualism of modern art, and to its pretension of being at the same time completely pure and independent from any non-aesthetic criteria, presenting itself as the highest court of humanity and politics, as in Zola's case. Miklavž Prosenc announced the following characteristics of the Zürich Dada: the members of the group were emigrants and thus in exceptional situation; the group consisted of members of different nationalities, social position and professional background; the group was multi-artistic; their aim was to organise a cabaret programme; the relations between members of the group were extraordinary and somehow extremist due to the war and their emigrant position, but also oriented towards common goal and aggressive against other groups of emigrant artists; their artistic production claimed to be non-art and anti-art, and they declared themselves as non-artists in revolt against art and literature²⁵. We might add that this anti-art position was in itself political and met with instant political criticism - even from Lenin, who lived in neighbourhood and visited "Cabaret Voltaire" from time to time. This anti-art position, even without direct criticism of World War collapse of humanity, progress and civilisation, was obviously political, and it made visible that the position of

²²22. Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism. A Critical Analysis*, Vintage Books, New York 1961, p. 120

²³23. Very interesting book on socialist painting in Poland might confirm such hypothesis - Piotr Piotrowski, *Znaczenia modernizmu* (Meanings of Modernism), Rebis, Poznań 1999

²⁴24. Miklavž Prosenc, *Die Dadaisten in Zürich*, H. Bouvier u. Co. Verlag, Bonn 1967

²⁵25. Miklavž Prosenc, *Die Dadaisten in Zürich*, H. Bouvier u. Co. Verlag, Bonn 1967, p. 7

artistic traditionalism with its artistic autonomy, in spite of its a-political and anti-political independent and neutral surface, is political as well.

When the First World War was over, avant-garde artists who before the war attacked art as an institution, began to attack the institution of politics directly, blaming both culture and politics for the catastrophic death toll and fall of civilisation. Their expectations sometimes turned into messianic bathos, and their attitude to post-war political situation was one of a contemptuous sarcasm. This brought out the will to power mentioned by Boris Groys in the case of Russian futurists and other avant-garde movements²⁶. During post-war anarchy and fights in Berlin, Dada group organised numerous (anti)-political and at the same time (anti)-artistic events, as at the occasion of promotion of their journal "Jedermann sein eigener Fussball" (Everybody His Own Football). Their promotion parade in Barnum style around Berlin won them admiration of the common Berlin people and the arrest by the police. They were ready for both, and prepared stickers for their prison cells with "Hurrah Dada!" printed on them. They were accused of exposing the German Armed Forces to contempt, and their journal was found obscene. That has all been true, together with a fact that the main characteristics of a journal was anti-capitalism and anti-imperialism. But there has been something which pointed over the usual political slogans and artistic mockery. It was the anti-attitude which now covered not only art as an institution but politics as well. A result and resolution of the post-war German crisis was Weimar Republic. At the inaugurating ceremony in the Weimar State Theatre in 1919, Johannes Baader, a member of the Dada group, was on the gallery. He was throwing home-printed flysheets over the heads of the serious and self-promoting public which represented the political order of the new republic, and declared himself the first president of the new republic. Nearly fifty years after the event, the chronicler of the Dada movement Hans Richter still had some doubts about pure parody of this Dada gesture: "And he was quite serious...or was he?"²⁷. Dadaists declared a war against all authorities, left and revolutionary parties included, like in case of Berlin flysheet of 1919 (wrongly mentioned in Richter's book as flysheet from 1920) printed as announcement for the presentation of the Dada president of the Globe, declaration of revolutionary war against Weimar republic ("Wir werden Weimar in die Luft sprengen." - We will blow Weimar sky-high) and signed by "Der dadaistische Zentralrat der Weltrevolution" (Dadaist Central Council of the World Revolution) composed of Baader, Hausmann, Tristan Tzara, George Grosz, Marcel Janco, Hans Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck, Franc Jung, Eugen Ernst and A. R. Meyer²⁸. The case of Proletkult in the Soviet Union is even more radical example of this transformation of artistic groups in para-political parties and movements. Avant-garde artists became leaders and organisers of Proletkult organisation after the war and revolution, getting some support from minister of culture Lunatcharskii and from the creator of the idea of a special proletarian culture Bogdanoff. At the beginning of the twenties Proletkult had more members than the Communist Party, mostly young revolutionary guards who embraced artistic avant-garde ideas and methods as means of political struggle. The result was the first great struggle on the artistic front between Lenin's Central Committee and Proletkult leadership. This conflict is usually explained in terms of aesthetic traditionalism of Lenin and his comrades who did not want that the New World of Red Civilisation would become a world of avant-garde anti-art. But the essence of the conflict was situated elsewhere, in pure political question of who is in charge of arts and culture, and who is in charge of revolution as well. At the decisive meeting of Politburo on 11. October 1920 Lenin opened the discussion on Proletkult as purely political question: Party should be in charge of economical and cultural fields, members of the Party should be the main figures in these domains as well, and they should follow the politics of culture determined by party organs. When Bucharin expressed some reservations and sent Lenin a note with his doubts and questions, Lenin silenced his intervention with his own note. He wrote: "1. proletarian culture = communism; 2. Communist Party of Russia is its leading force; 3. class-proletar. = Communist Party of Russia = **the power of the Sowjets**. Do we all agree upon that?"²⁹ They did, and avant-garde group lost its influence in Proletkult which lost its importance and membership in next few years, especially because of the "normalisation" introduced against radical political and artistic ideas, with the implementation of so-called New economical politics (NEP), and with the progressive centralisation of political power in the Party leadership. At the same time of NEP "politically neutral" cultural institutions were introduced by the Party, like the journal "Krasnaya nov" (Red virgin Soil), and at the beginning of the Twenties Socialist Realism could be introduced as a politically neutral ground against the ideological struggles of proletarian artistic representatives in respective writers, painters and other societies.

This direct party politicisation of artistic groups and movements was apparent once more in communist countries in the eighties when artistic groups like Slovenian NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst) acted in public as para-political parties, albeit with more post-modern use of avant-garde tradition. Other artistic movements involved with post-modern identity making are para-partisan or even directly political party movements, as in the feminist art, marginal groups art (like African-Americans and Natives in USA or Australia) or in post-colonial art. All

²⁶26. Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin. Die Gespaltene Kultur in der Sowjetunion*, Carl Hanser Verlag, München-Vienna 1988

²⁷27. Hans Richter, *Dada. Art and Anti-Art*, Thames and Hudson, London 1965 (original 1964 in German)

²⁸28. Hans Richter, l.c., p. 126

²⁹29. Wladimir Grobunow, *Lenin und der Proletkult*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin 1979, pp. 128-131

these groups and movements fight for their art and its promotion with political means, and all these groups appear on the public stage with political and not just artistic or even purely aesthetic programmes and manifestos.

Third, with such engagement of art and artists, on the crossing between art and politics we arrived at a clash between anti-autonomy attitude of these more or less avant-garde groups and movements, and autonomised and reduced concept of politics and the political. This conflict was resolved by artistic groups on number of occasions with the avant-garde criticism of the concept of autonomy of the political, more or less using the same methods as against the autonomy of art. Modernist reduction of the political and delimitation of "political society" consisting of state institutions of power from "civil society" came under artistic critique and attack. Of course, part of the reduction and delimitation was the modernist "depoliticisation" of art, so this outcome seems completely logical - if art has to return into life and abandon its autonomy above everyday life of the society, politics has to abandon its autonomy from and above the civil society. Both the artistic and the political have to get connected once again as universal characteristics of all human activities, which were separated and differentiated in modernity. Modernist differentiation was negated in an overall manner, and not only as much as concerns art and its special ghetto. If we can agree that avant-garde was not successful in its attack against institutionalisation and commercialisation of art, artistic criticism of reduction of politics was even less successful. The acceptance of avant-garde artworks in the institutional framework might be somehow problematic, because those artworks were not produced to be artworks or to take part in art institutions at all, but while this contradictory acceptance gets some attention regularly, the political dimension is more or less forgotten or actively put away. Art but also anti-art, as it seems from the institutional perspective, have some eternal values worth preserving, but political dimension of anti-art is negligible, reduced or absent in contemporary institutional representations of the art of the 20th Century. Perhaps the most typical feature of artistic institutionalisation is precisely the depoliticisation of art and consequently of all artworks included in the artistic institution. This happens with historical avant-garde all the time and everywhere, but also with actually produced art of today. In Ljubljana, when an exhibition of post-socialist art was organised in Modern Gallery, Russian artist demanded to present the political dimension and action. The institution answered that it wants just an artistic event, without any political actions. Oleg Kulik (the usual trouble-maker of this kind) protested against such institutional reduction of art throwing eggs on all the participants of the ceremonial opening. Something similar happened again on the occasion of the Manifesta exhibition in Ljubljana last year, as another political scandal designed by the same artist for the gala opening. On both occasions political dimension was present in the exhibition, but only in polite manner of abstract humanistic representations of Balkan wars (some call this kind of art "Soros realism", the other speak about highbrow soap operas) which can still keep art and partisan politics at a distance, and leave autonomy of post-modern globalisation of politics and its distance from all the other autonomous activities untouched. This kind of engagement is quite similar to the status of moderate modernism under communist rule. The process of the institutionalisation of art of the 20th Century is the process of distillation of art from all its political ingredients, especially those which testify that art could be involved with politics as an independent para-political subject and those which represent negation of existing borders between exclusive "political society" and de-politicised "civil society".

As a conclusion, let us recapitulate three characteristics of relationships between art and politics in the 20th Century:

1. art as something autonomous, organised upon the aesthetic which can offer support to the political through the use of its aesthetic "*promesse de bonheur*" enforcing the political "*promesse de bonheur*";
2. art as an autonomous entity which also has a political principle of its own, the aesthetic or anti-aesthetic as demanding and manifesting how the whole humanity or any community could reach the gates of salvation; the (anti)aesthetic is here the political principle of the universal in human being which answers the enigma/puzzle of history;
3. art crossing all boundaries and demarcation lines of its own competence, denying the political its own autonomy and sovereignty over the society in principle; this is sometimes articulated in the totalitarian manner, but more often today as "*persiflage*" or parody of the differentiation and demarcation of *politeia*.