

PROCESSUS

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Introduction to Surmodernism

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Translator's Note

This English edition of *Processus* was produced with the assistance of Claude Sonnet 5 (Anthropic) under Arthur Bitsch's direct supervision and final validation of every formulation. The translation proceeded chapter by chapter: each chapter was first translated in full from the French manuscript, then read and corrected by hand by Arthur Bitsch, who annotated the draft directly; those corrections were then applied and, wherever they established a general rule of terminology, register, or method, locked into a running glossary so that the same choice would be honored consistently in every subsequent chapter rather than re-decided each time. No chapter was considered final until validated by Arthur Bitsch in this way.

A number of methodological choices were fixed over the course of this process and apply uniformly throughout the book:

Certain concepts central to Arthur Bitsch's framework are rendered according to established scholarly convention rather than by literal translation. For instance, Nietzschean terms follow the Walter Kaufmann standard (*surhomme* as «overman,» not «superman»), and the Deleuze–Guattari *être/devenir* pairing follows the «concept-first» convention of Brian Massumi's English translation of *A Thousand Plateaus* (e.g., «the being-artist,» «the becoming-artist»). A small number of terms and phrases — such as *élan vital*, or certain untranslatable turns of phrase built on French or Italian wordplay — are left in the original language, where translation would flatten the point being made.

Quotations from other authors appearing in the footnotes were cited by Arthur Bitsch in French. Many of these works were not originally written in French: authors such as Nietzsche, Jung, Aristotle, Hegel, Guénon, Le Corbusier, or Marinetti are cited from French translations or editions of texts originally written in German, Greek, Italian, or other languages, rather than from their language of origin, while a few cited authors (Gombrich, Huxley, Duchamp, Arendt) in fact wrote in English themselves. Where an existing published English translation of the original work could be identified with confidence, that translation has been used and is cited accordingly. This was possible for the large majority of citations, including some verified against their original publication. Where it was not possible to locate the exact published wording, the footnote instead offers an English rendering of the French translation Arthur Bitsch cited, brought as close as possible to the wording of existing official English translations of the author in question, and this is noted where relevant. A full bibliography of works cited, cross-referencing the French edition used with the corresponding English edition where one exists, appears at the end of this volume. Readers wishing to cite these passages in scholarly work should consult the original or an authoritative published English edition directly.

Foreword

Have I ever really wanted to be a designer?

No, I want to be an artist. Before being a designer, I need to be an accomplished artist and the philosopher of my own thought.

Wasn't the original objective to be a designer in order to later become an artist?

That was driven by the lure of profit, not by any genuine initiatory quest.

Do I need to help people improve their lot by buying products they will throw away after use?

No, the needs of others matter little to me. What I want is to create for creation's sake. I want to create for myself, and thereby develop myself as an individual.

At the time this essay was conceived, I was still in a phase of transition, that of the designer sensing the limitations of his medium. I felt then the pressing need to attach myself to art. This tension between art and design is doubtless what triggered the need to define and structure my thought, so that, through writing, I might discover my true vocation.

It is true that the difference usually drawn between design and art lies in its destination. Art is entirely intrinsic, whereas design applies the discoveries made by creativity and its experimental nature to objects or services meant for others. Art is looked at by people, but it is not made for them; they are merely spectators of an intellectual and creative labor. Duchamp's theory of the spectator, however, brings this logic of separation between design and art into confrontation. The boundaries thus become rather blurred, but it was certain that I needed to answer these questions.

We can take the current example of collectible design, which now recovers all the codes of art and of galleries. These design objects are created more for their concept or their aesthetic than for their original utility. Here, I think, lies the representation of the limits of mass consumption. We must now create objects as works of art in order to differentiate them from everything already created. The added value of these objects lies precisely in their character as works of art. They are no longer mere everyday objects. And, in the end, we can return to Duchamp, who was the first to exhibit objects as works with his famous ready-mades.

Design, properly speaking, has its origin in the development of mass consumption, from the Great Exhibition of the Crystal Palace through to the founding of the Bauhaus. It is also a more «artisanal» movement, sustained by William Morris. Its definition cannot be fixed: like its era, design is multiform. Tending toward mass industry, but also toward a craft discipline, I now believe it must be considered an art in its own right.

Or rather, as a medium in its own right for the artist. Indeed, modernity having trivialized everyday objects on a scale never before seen, it is important to consider these objects as potential means of expression. Design, as a whole, is one of the fields of creation that comes closest to modern man. It thus falls to the artist to restore an artistic soul to the object, and so to transform it into a true artifact. The messages hidden within these objects will be the keys by which future civilizations come to understand our own.

Beyond these archaeological considerations, it became clear to me that design was, in the end, more a medium than a discipline. This medium seems to me to be one of the mediums most in step with our contemporaries, and thus an effective means of disseminating an artistic thought. Within the logic of artistic expression, it is now time to consider the designer as an artist. Whether a good artist or a bad one remains to be proven, and only a total artist, using this or that medium according to its conceptual effectiveness, and choosing it with pertinence, could be a good artist.

I had therefore embarked on a headlong flight into a design that was too classical, too venal. In doing so, I set aside my first objective: that of being an artist. Being an artist, in its fullest, most global sense.

Art is not a means of living, it is life itself.

This book is thus the result of a long maturation on the real status of the artist. Starting from questions about my own practice, I understood that I was an artist, not merely a designer. The choice to write was, moreover, made possible by this realization that, as an artist, I had no need to reduce myself to a single means of expression. This essay is therefore written by a practicing artist. It is written as a deep journey within the thought of a creator seeking to produce a work that must open his mind to what the artist is, and further still, to what he is becoming. In writing this book, I began, above all, from an introspective study of my internal process at the moment a work appears and is created. Starting from these personal sensations, I attempt here to rationalize them and give an account of them. This work is at once a work of creation in its own right and an attempt to understand the cognitive process of creation. It is an experimentation with the psyche as a malleable entity. Here, the work of psychology, and notably Jung's work on the unconscious, will be paramount.

This book is also accompanied by essential references, which have shaped the concepts we will explore further on. Nietzsche, first, who has structured my thought for many years through his logics of the overman, of eternal return, of the inversion of values. But also René Guénon for his vision of complex cycles, Aldous Huxley for that of perception, Duchamp as a founding figure of contemporary art, Le Corbusier as a pure modernist, Hegel for his introduction to aesthetics, or again Marinetti the Futurist. Numerous quotations will accompany the reading, in order to anchor this text within the sphere of thinkers of art, philosophy, psychology, and even metaphysics. This book, however, is not the writing of

an academic or a scholar, but that of an active creator, attempting to give an account of the internal mechanisms of the creative process. This essay is, above all, an introspection, a self-psychoanalysis.

Writing was chosen as the simplest means available to define my thought. It requires no studio, a computer at most. Unlike the production of artifacts, design objects, or painting and sculpture, which, themselves, require space, machines, logistics. Through this essay, I am making a necessary transition from the medium of design to the medium of writing. As a multidisciplinary artist, I had to adapt the means of expression I use to the imperatives dictated by my unconscious, in order to transfigure my practice. Thus, as may perhaps be felt in the reading, this essay is composed of fragments of thought initially gathered as notes. These fragments were, for the most part, set down on paper in a kind of automatic writing process. My work has been to find the link between these flashes of insight and to structure them into a coherent thought.

This work is thus the representation of an immanent and definitive shift toward the total artist, the representation of an immutable movement toward the experimentation of being. Through the writing of this book, I enact my own transfiguration toward the artist-being and toward acceleration, so as to fully espouse the current of the millennium. This movement, which I had already sensed, was already embodied in certain of my works. I needed to express it in words. Now, my vision is clearer and more informed. And already, new ideas are germinating in my mind.

INTRODUCTION

To open the doors of this essay, I must first sketch, at minimum, the ideas and concepts I will present throughout this book. To do so, we will need to explore, in this introduction, several general questions about art. This is in order to widen our field of reflection and to define certain basic understandings of the subject. I want to begin, then, by taking stock of the art of the last century, and of the one to come.

The complete and total revolution of the early twentieth century, which was, in reality, an accelerated evolution of art running from Impressionism through Modernism and on to Dada and Surrealism, radically upended the Western art world. We can also state that «Western art» became world art, evidently through the globalization that emerged and intensified over the course of that century. It is important to note, however, that art and its various movements follow an evolution across the ages that is not linear, not a progress ever rising toward some higher point, but cyclical. These cycles, of greater or lesser span, answer one another across time, and the artist, if he manages it, can seize the momentum of one of these cycles for his own creation.

We can affirm, for instance, that the modern, conceptual revolution acted, on one hand, upon the classical mediums used by our predecessors. With the Cubists, the Surrealists, Minimalism, Conceptual art, and so many other movements, the boundary of mediums shattered, and we can now say that the artist as «craftsman» of painting and sculpture gave way to an intellectual, theoretical artist. Today, the artist can express himself through a variety of mediums once forbidden by the strictures of classical academicism. What matters now is not the medium, but the artist's intention.

Yet, faced with this opening of the possible, and with the void it created, we can say that contemporary art finds itself at an impasse. Although, in theory, every field has been opened, we observe a mechanism that is counter-intuitive yet perceptible: contemporary art seems to be stagnating. Beyond a simple critique of this state of affairs, we should rather question its causes. As stated earlier, we can advance here the notion of cycle. Contemporary art has indeed reached a state of stagnation that we might also define as decadence. Thus this new academicism, which reached its acme in the middle of the last century, is bound to collapse and give way to a new cycle. We can already sense today the first stirrings of this regenerated cycle through the creations of new avant-gardes, certainly less structured than in the past, owing to the deep individualization of our society, but nonetheless widely visible, aesthetically, in new works being made.

Likewise, and it seems this was already the case during the modern revolution, technological causalities have arrived to upend not only forms but the very character of the artist and his works. Just as photography once buried figuration in its own time, we now face the emergence of a world-machine with the rise of artificial intelligences and new digital tools. Where photography removed the painter's or sculptor's need to represent «reality,» we now possess tools capable, on one hand, of bringing about a return to figuration, but

also, and above all, of provoking an upheaval in methods of conceptualization.

So, what can we say of the state of art at the dawn of this second millennium?

We can sense today the first signs of an aesthetic shift. We can note, for instance, a running out of breath in the forms and concepts of conceptual and abstract art. We observe a use of this art that verges on the pure and simple imitation of works already produced at the outset of these movements. Within French art schools, for example, the teaching that once prevailed, that of the classical arts, has long since been replaced by this new academicism: that of the abstract and conceptual art we have been discussing. Certainly, this teaching allows one to learn the aesthetic revolution of the last century, to experience it, or rather to reproduce it. This is doubtless instructive for understanding the very foundation of today's art, especially since it remains misunderstood by most non-artists. This disappearance of classicism and its figuration at the start of the last century, far from being negative in itself, nonetheless saw the emergence of this new academicism, which is already being roughed up by more or less conscious avant-gardes.

As for a hypothetical return of this same figuration, it seems to me of lesser importance, and would rather be a form of reactionary response to abstraction and to the concept. For that very reason, it could not carry the revolutionary force inherent to the start of a new cycle. Likewise, speaking of a potential return to classical forms of creation, the artist's role is not to be a craftsman mastering a technical skill. Returning to classical painting or drawing would be meaningless, except as a reproduction of past creations. Reactionary critics of art today, like those of the last century, have simply, out of intellectual laziness, decreed that classical art was *de facto* superior to the art of their own time, which they themselves defined as decadent. Such critics are not the readers this book addresses, for their field of vision is confined to the past. What this book means by decadent is a state of affairs detached from any aesthetic conception. Decadence is simply the natural, terminal phase of a cycle: pure energy, pure movement. Thus our era, that of postmodernity, is the decadent phase of modernity.

This postmodern society, then, is characterized by several structuring phenomena. One quite perceptible phenomenon of our society is its acceleration, notably technological.

How are we to reconcile the emergence of new intelligences capable of creating with the future of the artist? The machine can execute tasks usually carried out by man, but can robots dream?

This theory of acceleration is not confined to technology alone, and will be developed further later on. We will see to what extent this energy of movement can be harnessed to favor artistic creation and the emergence of new paradigms. We will also address how this accelerationism acts as a vector of civilizational change.

Returning to postmodernity, we further observe a phenomenon of atomization within so-

ciety. For art, this translates into an impressive multiplicity of practices. Of course, in earlier ages, art at the global level was also highly diverse, but today the fact is that the art world functions through a reciprocal entanglement of creations from across the entire globe. This creates a sense of the smoothing-over of each people's or ethnicity's aesthetic particularities. On the other hand, we have an infinity of individuals creating each in their own manner, interconnected through the world-network. Counter-intuitive as it may be, our era of «Western» art, now to be defined as world-art, is incredibly diverse. This diversification stems from the individuation of beings within a more global scheme. Today, it is the individual who takes precedence, not a movement, a religious order, a nation, an ethnicity. Should we, then, speak of a crisis of modernity, a crisis of the modern world? I do indeed put forward the postulate that our modern world is nearing the end of a cycle. I believe this crisis to be, above all, the metaphysical and mystical crisis of our era. We have succeeded in emancipating ourselves from God and from former allegiances, but this metaphysical lack makes itself felt within postmodernity.

Within this framework, this book's postulate is to start from the individual in order to recreate a new mysticism, one that must complete our world. I say «complete,» for I am not a wholesale critic of modernity, quite the contrary. Modernity has granted us an impressive qualitative leap, at the price of our souls. It remains possible, however, to breathe a soul back into this world-machine. The elements of change are now in place and foreshadow the imminent emergence of a new artistic cycle.

With these elements concerning our postmodern society in mind, we will see in what way the artist has become essential. We will focus in particular on what the artist archetype represents, how his process of creation allows for an emancipation from the postmodern machine, and finally how far this artist-being can lead us into a new cycle of creation. We will thus develop, in this book, several key concepts, such as that of «sacred individualism» or that of «surmodernism.» This work is written, then, to represent the intrinsic, unconscious, and metaphysical foundations of the artist, so as to draw closer to transcendence — to surpass man and become the Prometheus who bears the light.

I. THE ARTIST

1. The Being-Artist

This work is not about art as a field, nor even about creation as a mere process. The primary subject of this book is the Artist: the artist and his existence in the world, his impact on reality.

As Ernst Gombrich wrote in *The Story of Art*:

¹ «There really is no such thing as Art. There are only artists.»

That being said, in order to be clear on our subject, we will nonetheless cite certain broad questions so as to place the figure of the artist within the contemporary field, along with certain developments dear to our era on the artist and his status. We do this in order to set aside certain moral assumptions and certain foundational understandings of the artist. We will then be able to enter fully into the heart of our subject.

Here, when we speak of artists, we mean: painter, sculptor, designer, architect, and so on, that is, creatives in the twenty-first-century sense of the term. The boundaries of art having expanded over recent centuries, it would be worthwhile to assert an updated definition in response to our era. An artist, in his contemporary definition, is thus not confined solely to the classical mediums of painting or sculpture. We can put forward the postulate that the architect, the poet, the filmmaker, the digital creator, or even the designer, among a multitude of other professions, are now artists. They are artists, but the reverse may not be true. In itself, it is not so much the trade or profession that makes us artists or not. We must therefore proceed from the principle that architecture, design, and film should be considered as mediums, mediums on the same footing as painting and sculpture. To make ourselves clear, what we call a medium is the canvas that the artist will use in order to express himself. Now, we can see clearly, taking the example of the purely industrial designer, that he is not automatically an artist. If his practice remains confined to the application of aesthetic rules that do not engage genuine creativity, then it would be difficult for us to grant him the title of artist. On the other hand, the same would hold if he remained confined to a purely functional or utilitarian reading.

There are, then, artists who use architecture, design, and other mediums to express themselves, and on the other side, individuals who consider painting, design, architecture, and so on, not as mediums, but as mere professions. We can, to advance our argument, cite here a passage from Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

¹ E.H. Gombrich, *Histoire de l'art*, Paris, Phaidon, p. 21. English: *The Story of Art*, London, Phaidon.

² «The man who is artistically impotent gives rise to a kind of art through the very thing that makes him, precisely, no artist at all.»

Here, the practitioner of a so-called «creative» profession who fails to demonstrate genuine artistic capacity cannot be defined as an artist. He would rather be confined to his profession, applying it without reflection, to the letter.

We can therefore affirm that the artist is not defined by his medium. Like William Morris, whose practice encompassed art, the decorative arts, and writing, or like Wagner and his *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art, in German): the complete artist must navigate between several mediums, according to what he feels to be the most pertinent for expressing his soul. Certain artists, of course, confine themselves to a single medium, and this is justified, for it is, to them, the sole channel they have found, the most effective for translating the depths of their soul. The question here would rather concern the use of this medium for purely artistic ends, and not for ends of mere imitation.

Thus, starting from the conception of the artist as being beyond his medium and its representation, it becomes possible for us to extend the discussion to what is called the applied arts. We will state:

One would still need to be an artist before wanting to apply art.

Here we are referring to the French definition of applied arts, successor to the founding of the decorative art schools and, of course, of the Art Nouveau and then Art Deco movements. This term, also used in English (*applied arts*), designates what can be described as the trades of the creative field. Here, we will understand these creative trades as being mediums in their own right. Applied art, then, consists in applying art to a function, to a medium.

We thus affirm that before one can apply art to a medium, one must, before that, be an artist. Being an artist, as we said earlier, is a state of being, and not simply a profession or a specialization. And so, fundamentally, the specialized creative, or one who is a mere executant within what is called the creative market, is not an artist. The artist, for his part, applies his ideas, his unconscious, to a medium. He modifies it, transfigures it according to his own point of view. It is therefore natural that the artist possesses an axis of decision that exceeds that of the mere creative.

These considerations on mediums and the status of the artist lead us naturally to another question. This last is one of the most fashionable, and certainly also one of the most tiresome, of our time:

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *La naissance de la tragédie*, Paris, Folio Essais, p. 113.
English: *The Birth of Tragedy*.

Must the work be separated from the artist, and vice versa?

The work, then, represents the artist's creation, produced through the use of a chosen medium. It cannot be separated from the artist: the one and the other are intimately bound and could not be understood if separated. That would amount to separating the soul from the body, the idea from its materialization in the real. We therefore answer this question very clearly and without compromise:

The separation of the work and the artist is a non-question. The artist's life is his work, and vice versa.

The artist, in choosing to represent his interiority through the use of a medium, performs the act of creating a work. This work being, in the artist's case, the fruit of a purely intrinsic mechanism. It is thus the representation, in the real, of what the artist is, and there can be no separation between the two.

Following this statement of the basic questions concerning the artist, the question of morality in art is likewise extremely important. It is often said that artists position themselves against the grain of morality and are understood only after their death. This vision of the romantic artist is, already, hackneyed today. We will simply say that this is due to the fundamentally sensitive nature of the artist toward the present. By fully capturing his era, the artist anticipates the future, and can thus take on the image of a prophet. He may nonetheless appear out of step with his own temporality.

The question of morality here is no longer tied to a strict morality applied by artists to their works, in the logic of commissions of a religious nature, for instance. We can cite here Duchamp, who, already, at the time of the great modern revolution, presented the new emancipatory nature of the artist:

³ «But such considerations no longer hold today; relations between the artist and society have changed since the day when, at the end of the last century, the artist affirmed his freedom.

Instead of being a craftsman in the employ of a monarch or of the Church, today's artist paints freely, and is no longer at the service of patrons, upon whom, on the contrary, he imposes his own aesthetic.

In other words, the artist is now fully integrated into society.

Emancipated for more than a century, today's artist presents himself as a free man, endowed with the same prerogatives as the ordinary citizen, and speaks as an equal with the buyer of his works.»

³ Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe*, Paris, Champs, p. 260. English: *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (ed. Sanouillet & Peterson).

We can nonetheless detect today that the artist remains, whatever happens, influenced by the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the age. Thus the artist's emancipation is not yet total, for, in the end, he still responds today to commissions, to open calls, when one takes into account the professional character of art.

Already, in his own time, Duchamp, in order to fully free himself from commissions and from the impact of money on his works, preferred to work as a librarian to support himself, so as to create works that were purely «true.»

The spirit of the age, financial considerations, and the morality of the times all influence artists. It is therefore necessary today, for the artist to be able to follow his destiny, that he detach himself as far as possible from the *Zeitgeist*, in order to create as authentic a work as possible. In sum, not to be an artist by trade, not to be the artist of a religion or a civilization. On the contrary, one must be an artist to the very depths of one's being, and depend on no morality.

We will return to this later, but here, the artist must not be subjective: he must be objective, but of an extreme objectivism. He must make an œuvre of his own objectivity, an objectivity based not on scientific or social facts, but a purely individual objectivity, pushed to the extreme.

Extrapolating from this «total objectivism,» we must also take into account the classical definition of the artist: that of a lying, conjuring artist. One could, were we to push the point, corroborate this with what I have just defined. The artist would thus be a selfish manipulator, distorting reality, reproducing the real through artifice in order to impose his own vision. It is important to note this deceptive nature of art, that of appearance, this illusory quality defined by the Greek philosophers and taken up again by Hegel and Nietzsche. The artist would in sum be a fine actor, which, in itself, remains a matter of perception.

In my view, art, and by extension the artist, lie beyond mere imitation. I would speak here rather of a will to discovery on the part of the artist, and of man in general. The definition of an artist working through «imitation» is likewise hackneyed or poorly understood. Indeed, imitation, which we might take for a negative fact, does not carry the same meaning: one must understand that one can imitate feelings, senses. This provides the keys to understanding mimesis, not in its purely material dimension, but truly as a representation.

If one replaces the term «imitation» with «representation» in certain translations of Greek texts, notably in Aristotle's *Poetics*, one obtains an entirely different meaning. We can see this in the following passage on tragedy:

⁴ «Of the poetry which represents imitates in hexameter verse, and of Comedy, we will speak hereafter. Let us now discuss Tragedy, resuming its formal definition, as resulting from what has been already said. Tragedy, then, is the representation an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation

⁴ Aristote, *Poétique*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, pp. 92-93. English: *Poetics*, trans. S.H. Butcher.

of these emotions. By 'language embellished,' I mean language into which rhythm, 'harmony,' and song enter. By 'the several kinds in separate parts,' I mean, that some parts are rendered through the medium of verse alone, others again with the aid of song.»

The sense itself, then, no longer follows the same logic. The artist, indeed, has no wish to dupe his audience by reproducing or imitating the real or the immaterial. No, the artist seeks to represent his perception, and this without any prior wish for display. Artistic work is, above all, individual.

We will go further in this development of the artist working for himself. We do not position ourselves within the logic of Marcel Duchamp's «spectator.» The work exists only because the artist decides it shall, and this in order to transcend his reality, his interiority. The public, the «spectators,» the buyers, are in the end secondary.

Or might this be a meanness on the artist's part, meant to make others believe in his omnipotence?

We proceed from the principle that it is not. Furthermore, as a creator playing an active, not a passive, role with regard to the work of art, unlike the critic, the historian, or the museum curator, we are permitted to affirm that the artist is the person best placed to speak of art. It is nonetheless enjoyable to watch specialists theorize and hold forth on the subject of a work. The theories put forward often turn out to be entirely opposed to the artist's intention. Through this phenomenon, the «specialists» only further thicken the veil of mystery covering the artist and his work.

Yet we may ask ourselves a legitimate question: if these specialists claim to understand artists and works, why do they not become artists themselves?

Once these considerations external to the artist are set aside, we must ask ourselves what accounts for this will of the artist to make a work, whatever the circumstances. We can say that, at first glance, it would seem strange to inflict upon oneself such material deprivation and inner conflict. And yet it is precisely because there is something superior in the act of pledging allegiance to the artistic vocation.

Is it to leave a trace in posterity? Certainly. This mechanism is equivalent to that of a monotheistic believer aspiring to a paradise of recognition after death. It would nonetheless be more accurate to say that being an artist is, above all, the will to experiment with life. The process is thus the artist's priesthood, and it is for this that he has created, creates, and will always create. There is no finality in the artistic approach. The works are never finished; they stand as stages of the great artistic work — that of a life of creation.

2. The Becoming-Artist

Creation, then, acts as a life principle. Creation, the act of creating, art in itself, represents a genuine philosophy. The artist, in this context, transcends the mere materiality of a suggested profession and transposes himself into a stratum at once more personal and more transcendent. The act of creating becomes a «*way of living*,» a path of life. Art then becomes a true ontological necessity for the artist. Anselm Kiefer explained this well during his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 2010:

⁵ «Although it is impossible to define art, although it constantly eludes our understanding, one thing is certain: I, as the man I am, am incapable of living without art. This is easy to say, and yet it is far more than a simple sentence. It is, as far as I am concerned, a total dependency. Art is for me a condition *sine qua non*. If it embodies the greatest of illusions, it nonetheless represents, in my eyes, freedom together with a form of servitude. Wherever I go, whatever I do, everything is always dictated to me by art.»

The artist lives for and through art; it is his means of existence, a total and inexplicable dependency — inextricable. At once a life energy and an obligation for the survival of the being. In this sense, we can affirm that, at a time when beliefs are disappearing, the artist finds in art a metaphysical vocation, a power that is within him and that likewise surpasses him. A will to transcendence, a will to eternity. This is, in itself, a replacement for the rebirth once offered by the various religions. It is in human nature to want, beyond metaphysical considerations, to leave a trace in existence and to free oneself from the finitude of life. Here we touch upon the irrational logic of the artist with regard to his practice. He can consider nothing but creation. For the artist, art becomes the mystical palliative of the contemporary world, the world without religion. Thus, through creation, the artist tends to transcend himself by the paths of the unconscious and its materialization in the real. It is art for art's sake, as Walter Benjamin represents and superimposes it at the beginning of modernity for the world of art:

⁶ «With the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction, photography, simultaneously with the rise of socialism, art sensed the approaching crisis which has be-

⁵ Anselm Kiefer, *L'art survivra à ses ruines*, leçon inaugurale prononcée le 2 décembre 2010 au Collège de France. English: *Art Will Survive Its Ruins*, bilingual French/English edition, Paris, Éditions du Regard, 2011.

⁶ Walter Benjamin, *L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproductibilité technique*, Paris, Folio Plus Philosophie, pp. 19-20. English: «The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,» trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*.

come evident a century later. At the time, art reacted with the doctrine of l'art pour l'art, that is, with a theology of art.»

Starting from these notions of the theological status of art, the logical explanation might come from the artist's «outside of reality» nature. Today, our disenchanted societies are searching for this transcendence, once again as a palliative to the death of God. The artist, as the mysterious figure of our era, still tends toward this inexplicable aspect of the mind. Genius, for instance, as defined by Hegel in his *Introduction to Aesthetics*, is the one who possesses the general power of artistic creation, together with the energy necessary to exercise that power⁷. Here, the nature of genius lies at once in the capacity to capture the irrational elements of reality and of the unconscious, and in the capacity to use them in order to transform reality. We speak here, then, of «power»: this active aspect of the artist is fundamental to his vocation of sublimating the real, but also of subjugating the «spectator.»

We might then ask ourselves at what point the artist passed from the status of craftsman to that of «philosopher-magician.» Is this perhaps due chiefly to his elevation to apotheosis by modern individualization? Or have the artist and art always had this dual character, tying them either to craftsmanship or to art as a superior thing?

The artist is certainly the craftsman in the service of priests during the Middle Ages, and his status changes with the Renaissance. He becomes far more than a mere craftsman, and we see, from this era onward, the appearance of quasi-mythical figures: from Michelangelo to Raphael, by way of Leonardo da Vinci. Society's vision of the artist thus differs radically across the ages. This opens our debate on the quality of the artist. Is he either a good craftsman, or a genius touched by grace? Is he endowed with a transcendence surpassing the common run of mortals, or with a merely technical gift?

The conception of an artist surpassing the status of craftsman is formed, in my view, through his representation as a prophet. Not prophet in relation to society, but prophet as seer, through the mechanisms of perception. Thanks to his great sensibility, his great sensitivity, he is able to perceive the vibrations of an era, and is thus capable, through his unconscious, of anticipating the future. Like a shaman, he predicts the future. Going further into these notions of the perception of the real and the unreal, we can draw a parallel with the use of drugs, which allow the senses to be sharpened in order to better perceive the vibrations of reality. The artist would then be endowed with a deferred perception of reality. Others will say, if they believe in the «matrix» theory, that the artist is a «glitched» element, which allows him to perceive reality beyond the simulation.

He is the one who creates concepts and puts them into image, provoking the astonishment of the initiated. To go further in these musings on the status of the artist as the mystic of our era, and as a modern priest:

Is he capable of creating a new religion, a new belief? Is the museum the secular church

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction à l'esthétique* — Le beau, Paris, Champs, pp. 356-357. English: *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox.

of modernity?

In a disenchanted present, where rationalism and materialism have taken possession of the collective unconscious, it seems natural to turn toward these mystical figures, to deify what may still remain inexplicable. In itself, this phenomenon is the result of our modern, and now postmodern, societies. This may bring to mind Nietzsche's last man, incapable of perceiving transcendence, who now turns toward new idols. Marcel Duchamp, here, presents these metaphysical events, and notably the artist's confrontation with the modern functionalist world:

⁸ «Today the artist is a curious reservoir of para-spiritual values in absolute opposition to daily FUNCTIONALISM, for which science receives the homage of a blind admiration. I say blind, because I do not believe in the supreme importance of these scientific solutions, which do not even touch on the personal problems of the human being.»

There would thus indeed be something more to the artist. The mystical phenomena outlined above must be understood, first of all, as intrinsic to the artist himself. We must rather focus on what this presages as a development of the artist-self. Thus, these considerations of «belief» regarding the artist's capacity to subjugate his era must not be seen as a kind of artistic religion, but rather as phenomena allowing for a transfiguration of being: an inner work aimed at the transformation, the transfiguration, of the individual. And thus a genuine operative magic.

We will take an alchemical image to represent one of the phases of this inner work. Let us take the alchemical work in black, the nigredo. It represents the sacrificial phase of the becoming-artist. It is, in itself, the amalgam, the syncretism of personal and shared myths of the past, which are assembled and then burned, destroyed, suppressed, before reaching the sublimation of the Self. We must understand here that, to be an artist, one must pass through a profound inner path. Thus, the creative individual, in order to truly become an artist, must pass through the creative process and several phases of transformation in order to reach the being-artist.

The artist, in our conception, is therefore not the shaman, the priest, or the mage of some new belief born of modernity. He must be understood as a fundamental archetype of man, an archetype that can be invoked in order to achieve an evolution of the self.

⁸ Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe*, Paris, Champs, p. 261. English: *The Writings of Marcel Duchamp* (ed. Sanouillet & Peterson).

3. The Archetype-Artist

Before beginning our development of the artist archetype, it is important to take into consideration the work of C. G. Jung on archetypal figures and symbols, in order to properly consider their tangible nature with regard to the character of the artist and his representation. For a proper understanding of what follows concerning the specific nature of archetypes and their influence on the psyche, we will cite this passage from *Symbols of Transformation*:

° «Psychological truth by no means excludes metaphysical truth, though psychology, as a science, has to hold aloof from all metaphysical assertions. Its subject is the psyche and its contents. Both are realities, because they work. We possess no criterion that could help us to judge the being or non-being of the soul as such; we know, however, that the psychic exists, and indeed is existence itself. We do not possess a physics of the soul, and are not even able to observe it and judge it from some Archimedean point ‘outside’ ourselves, and can therefore know nothing objective about it, since all knowledge of the psyche is itself psychic; in whatever way we define it, we are always dealing with its own image. The psyche creates reality every day. The only expression I can use for this activity is fantasy. [...] It is the mother of all possibilities, where, like all psychological opposites, the inner and outer worlds are joined together in living union. Fantasy it was and ever is which fashions the bridge between the irreconcilable claims of subject and object, introversion and extraversion. In fantasy alone both mechanisms combine.

The symbols it creates are always grounded in the unconscious archetype, their nascent form deriving from the acquired representations of consciousness. The archetypes are the numinous, structural elements of the psyche, and possess a certain autonomy and specific energy which enables them to attract, out of the conscious mind, those contents which are best suited to themselves. The symbols act as transformers, their function being to convert libido from a ‘lower’ into a ‘higher’ form. This function is so important that feeling accords it the highest values. The symbol works by suggestion; that is to say, it carries conviction and at the same time expresses the content of that conviction. It is able to do this because of the numen, i.e. the specific energy stored up in the archetype. Experience of the archetype is not only impressive, it seizes and possesses the whole personality, and is naturally productive of faith.»

We will thus understand, in light of this passage, that the archetype, although defined by the science of psychology, holds within it a metaphysical dimension. The archetype,

° Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l’âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 386. English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5.

through its power of suggestion, transforms the soul of the individual. These archetypes and symbols therefore truly hold an influence in the real, through their suggestive power. In this way, they inhabit the individual. We can thus develop what would define the archetype of the artist as a symbol of freedom and creativity. We shall see that this archetype is nonetheless not simple to describe, and may hold several meanings within it.

To begin with, the artist is above all a two-headed figure. We will speak here of the nature of the artist in its Nietzschean conception, the latter being represented by his opposites, Dionysus and Apollo. These two archetypes are not, however, antagonistic; they complement one another within the artist. The artist is thus drawn, on the one hand, toward excess, and, on the other, toward the Cartesian production of technique: chaotic beauty and the beauty of proportion in a single being. Of course, there may be, among certain artists — I am speaking here of artists as individuals — more of a tendency toward one force or the other. But these two gods both live within the artist and animate him, possess him.

In developing this two-headed aspect of the artist from the Nietzschean duality presented in *The Birth of Tragedy*, we can say that certain artists incline toward one medium according to whether they are more Dionysian or more Apollonian by nature. Naturally, this can differ according to the individual. One might note, for example, that the artist-architect will show traits relating more to the Apollonian nature, these being tied to the great technical rigor demanded by the architectural medium. One can nonetheless find architects of Dionysian tendency, thinking of Gaudí or even the *Facteur Cheval*. Developing this further, it is not necessarily the artist who chooses his medium; rather, he is drawn to this or that medium according to his more Apollonian or Dionysian inclination. For other mediums, or even other eras of art, we likewise see the influence of one archetype or the other. Take neoclassicism in painting, which would be oriented more toward an Apollonian nature of creation. This same neoclassicism would later be replaced by Symbolism and Dionysian Romanticism.

As stated earlier, the archetype of the artist is thus two-headed, and partakes of both Greek divinities at once. It seems to me that the total artist would be the one who has fully mastered both of these archetypal aspects. He would thus be capable of controlling and using his Dionysian or Apollonian inclinations in the service of a work and a specific medium, all within a Nietzschean conception oriented toward the creation of a truly tragic work. Thus, the total artist is the one who masters both the beauty of chaos and the beauty of order. In creating a work, he creates a tragedy, the total work.

We could discuss at length the potential conscious awareness of these unconscious phenomena, their coming into consciousness, and their mastery. For the artist, our certainty is that of a polarity of the being-artist, a natural inclination.

We can say, for instance, that the Dionysian pole would relate rather to the libido, that subterranean, natural, unconscious energy. The Apollonian pole, meanwhile, could be translated as the conscious and willed phase of the artist. The unconscious, here, and especially

the collective unconscious, would act as a catalyst for these two poles, and as a producer of symbols and images, useful to the artist as ideas and flashes of genius. The artist would thus be nourished at once by the forces of the Dionysian libido and by those of the Apollonian consciousness.

Once these psychological considerations are established, we will return to the archetype of the artist as such. It is now clear that the latter is fundamentally bipolar, which explains, on the one hand, the difficulty of understanding this archetype can generate, but also, on the other hand, a certain fascination arising from its mystery. This bipolar archetype could be syncretized into a single figure, that of the Creator, the architect of the universe, mastering the polarity of being in order to bring to life, to create a world, a cosmos. Here, let us take as illustration the image of *The Ancient of Days* ¹⁰, engraved by William Blake:



¹⁰ William Blake, *The Ancient of Days*, 1794, engraved and watercolored frontispiece for *Europe a Prophecy*.

In his representation, Blake depicts Urizen, symbol of reason. His complementary opposite is imagination, represented by Los. We can see here the same duality between Apollo and Dionysus. In our symbolic and archetypal development, however, we take the figure of the Creator, represented by The Ancient of Days, as the syncretism of these two poles.

The fusion of the two poles then gives us a total archetype of the artist, mastering the opposing forces of the unconscious and the conscious and materializing them in the real through creation. Thus we have the true foundation of the artist, namely creation: the creation of a demiurge. The free, creating artist, dictating to matter what his unconscious signifies to him. He brings matter to life. We thus have, once again, an aspect of quasi-mystical fascination regarding the artist's capacity to create, to create a world. He is at once total individual and sculptor of reality. This confers upon the archetype of the artist a quite particular force. The artist is the representation of the individual freed from his chains and tending toward deification.

It is easy to see other archetypal figures here. The artist remaining human, but tending toward the archetype of the Creator through *hubris*, one could also find in this symbol the figures of Icarus, Lucifer, and Prometheus: the bearers of light. These visions are anchored in a logic that is human, all too human. The artist must tend toward transcendence, while remaining a being of matter. The artist dictating his rules to matter, while thereby being absorbed by that same materiality:

¹¹ «The titanic artist had enough arrogance in him to believe himself capable of creating men or, at the very least, of annihilating gods — and this by virtue of the superiority of a wisdom which he was, it is true, compelled to expiate in eternal suffering.»

4. Body and Spirit

Thus, the artist remains, above all, a man. He is not only spirit or body, he is both at once. He is not pure archetype alone; he remains within reality and cannot be purely immaterial, pure fantasy. There is no separation of soul and body. There is a sensation of separation, but in reality the body is as much soul as the soul is body. Thus, certainly, there is detachment during the plunge into the unconscious, into dreams, but this is possible thanks to the ner-

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *La naissance de la tragédie*, Paris, Folio Essais, p. 66. English: *The Birth of Tragedy*

vous system, to the body. Within a view of the individual as mystical center, it is therefore not conceivable to separate the two. There is no paradise; the soul is reincarnated in the same body indefinitely, there is no way out. In this sense, the metaphysics of the artist is a mysticism anchored in the real and, though this may seem contradictory, it is materialist.

It is easy to see the level of decrepitude to which the adherents of beliefs in the detachment of soul and body are led. They drown in the abyssal depths of the illusion of the soul and the unconscious. Thus, as an artist, as a creator, one must resurface, at the risk of this disembodiment, and watch one's body and one's entire being putrefy. The reverse mechanism is also observable in certain of our contemporaries. In them, this time, we note an absence of soul, or its effacement. These latter either become conscious of this and, by choice, decide to live as pure materialists, as mere bodies, or others simply have no soul or consciousness. This absence of soul is quite prevalent in our era, and the becoming-artist thus offers a return to the totality of being, through the body, actor of change, and the spirit, source of change.

To conclude our development, let us return to our initial question. What does it mean to be an artist? We condense this into the formula of the being-artist, representing at once a being and a way of being. The artist, beyond his mere function, is a philosophical archetype: that of the free, creating man. It is a path of being, an ideal and an accomplishment. In becoming an artist, and I say this on the philosophical and metaphysical level, not merely in its material character, the world opens up. We can invent everything, create everything, destroy everything.

The reality principle governing our postmodern world can thus be undermined, allowing for the individual's self-realization. Through creative thought and its execution upon the matter of the medium, the artist becomes the creator of his own world. As a result, he is eminently free and endowed with a quasi-mystical power. What confers this power upon the artist is the ability to shape reality with his own hands. To shape reality, but from the work of the soul. To be an artist is to animate matter — to give birth to the Golem.

The being-artist is the new hero of our civilizations. The hero of a world of the individual, by the individual, the modern Prometheus. This path of the artist is the path toward transcendence. Man has killed the gods; he can now be his own myth. The chains of man have been broken at the price of his soul; the artist attempts to restore it to him.

The becoming-artist is a road of alchemical transfiguration, a work upon the self. Freedom is not free; it demands sacrifices. It is by destroying our mental strictures that we manage to free our mind, in order to allow it to evolve toward another stage of consciousness. The consciousness of the total individual, he who is the Alpha and the Omega of his own existence. Once this mutation of the soul's plasticity has taken place, it becomes possible to create.

In creating, man becomes an artist, and thus an actor in his own life. To be an artist is to be beyond a social status, beyond a mere profession. To be an artist is to become mage,

philosopher, thinker, virtuoso. To be an artist is, above all, to be the black hole of existence, the focal point of the universe.

Thus, the majority of the self-proclaimed artists of our age only play a role, using their image to gain acceptance from their fathers and from their era. The artist, however, cares nothing for the gaze of others, nor even for his place in society. His work is not situated there, but infinitely above all of that. The artist is a mystic, a mystic of his own vision, of his own creation. What he creates, he creates for himself and for the centuries to come. The artist is the surpassing of self and of his era, the refusal of the *Zeitgeist*, pure freedom.

The evolution toward the state of the being-artist must take place through the sacrifice of one's being, through the ritual suicide of one's former soul. This, in order to be endlessly reborn and to be able to attain the status of creator. The cost of the sacrifice is the modification of one's soul, of one's unconscious, irremediably altered — trepanned. In so doing, we substitute ourselves for the old world in order to reach another world through a unique perception. This latter allows for the capture of the metaphysical elements of the cosmos. The artist is then at once outside the world and the center of the world. He manages to transfigure himself through an alternative reality. This reality is his own, it belongs to him, and this awareness of the self is the cornerstone of the great work.

II. THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Zeitgeist

We have, up to this point, been able to develop certain elements of a mystical order, but this was in order to understand the role of the artist for the individual, or at least the role of the artist archetype. In the end, all these figures are symbols and representations. They help us understand the foundations of our species, of our civilizations. Perhaps the representation of divinities, and notably those of polytheism, has more to do with man as such and his various facets: a mythological representation of individuals, who are themselves quite real. For the postmodern conception, these are merely pure archetypes and pure symbols, used for their evocative force and their power to modify the individual.

Let us now refocus on questions of a more contemporary order. We will then see in what way the figure of the artist seems to be the new vector of force and will for our era.

There exists a phenomenon of accelerated atomization within our societies. That is to say, a division of each individual within society itself. Each person becomes increasingly individual, and values once held in common likewise tend to disappear. In itself, the postmodern world is the world of the individual by the individual. Let us take the example of trans identity. Beyond mere questions of gender and sexuality, this would rather be an extreme inclination toward individualization and the rejection of things commonly imposed by morality or by nature, going as far as an ever more «atomized,» ever more differentiated specification of gender or of species. Trans identity is one of the consequences of the extrapolation of Promethean man, deciding his own being and surpassing both the gods and nature.

As we have said, the atomization of society is also observable at the level of values and of contemporary social movements or groups. We observe this phenomenon in new movements, whether political or not. Let us take the example of accelerationism as a concept and political movement. This latter splinters into multiple branches: a/acc, e/acc, u/acc, and so on. Let us return to questions of gender, and notably the LGBTQIA+ movements. These, in keeping with their acronym, are themselves increasingly atomizing, much like our society.

We can say that this postmodern society manages to destroy its own creations through their infinite multiplication, or at least through their individualization. Today, we number 8.2 billion. This phenomenon, which might seem harmful from a reactionary point of view, is nonetheless the representation of our era, and, beyond that, the effect of a more powerful, more subterranean movement: an almost unstoppable force, that of the individualization of the world.

So, how can one today manage to produce a movement, a community solid enough to en-

ture? Or, precisely, is the fact of multiplication and individualization not itself the strength of the next great concepts?

Let us note nonetheless, and this is paramount, that at a time of total individualization, the artist has his full place. He can express himself without risk, and has never been, at least in the Western world, so free to do as he pleases. This, however, within the limits of morality and moral conformism. One of the strangenesses of our time is this total belief in the freedom of individuals. Man is free to do as he pleases within certain limits; therefore, in the end, he has the right to do nothing at all. This is perhaps also one of the fundamental paradoxes of our societies. On the one hand, freedom is displayed as a banner, despite the subterranean forces explained earlier; on the other, a morality of the age, a moral conformism. The cursor may shift from value to value, yet it remains, nonetheless, in its place at the level of the morality of its era.

Another phenomenon of capital importance is the submersion of the world by the machine. Whether at the level of the means of production or at the level of the global communication system, this raises further questions that come into conflict, but also stoke the forces mentioned earlier.

Here, starting from this evocation of the machine, we can speak of the eternal copy in art. This is entirely problematic given the increasingly rapid development of artificial intelligences, which call into question the nature of art as mimesis. However, as we saw earlier, in contradiction with the Greek canons, I put forward the postulate that the artist is beyond mere mimicry. Through his research work and his constant revolution, he surpasses the machine in the strict sense of creativity. It remains to be seen what part the unconscious plays in the production of artists, in order to be able to differentiate them from the machine. We will speak here of the soul, which in itself must be what differentiates us from the machine. This latter, however, in our scientific and modern world, tends to be occulted. We can see this even at the level of the work of psychology, as Jung was able to observe:

¹² «Even modern psychology can only with great difficulty vindicate the existence of the human soul, and get it acknowledged as a form of existence with qualities that can be studied and therefore as an object of empirical science; that it does not depend solely on something external, but also possesses an autonomous inner life; and that it does not merely represent a conscious ego, but also an existence that can be reached only indirectly. [...] Modern rationalism wants to enlighten, and even makes a moral merit of its iconoclastic tendency.»

Let us return to a psychological vocabulary. Today, we compare ourselves to machines collecting data, but we forget that we have managed to teach them the conscious way of collecting data and storing it. We are, however, incapable of teaching them the collective

¹² Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l'âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, pp. 154-155. English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5

unconscious and the deepest strata of the psyche. Comparing our thought process to that of the machine is, in my view, highly reductive.

Can machines dream?

They are capable of directed thought, but as for dreaming, despite recent attempts, one cannot be certain.

Thus, as we have seen, our era is traversed by several intrinsic mechanisms: atomization, the world-machine, the occultation of the soul. All these mechanisms make postmodernity an era extremely dissimilar to those of past centuries. We can therefore still speak today of the prevalence of the *Zeitgeist*.

It is logical that this spirit of the times should influence creation. Nonetheless, in allowing oneself to be caught up by it, an obstacle is created to the discovery and rediscovery of new aesthetics. The artist's work, then, is to seek to detach himself from this *Zeitgeist* in order to return to a state of unconsciousness, so as to bring forth new forms. Thus, artists who define themselves as contemporary are, in reality, nothing but the rebirth of the classical artists whom they tend to decry and confront. Indeed, the new academicism materializes with contemporary art, just as certain that it has surpassed everything that can be done as their coreligionists of the past. We are not at the end of History: everything remains still to be created and discovered. The artist's role is to surpass the spirit of the times and to confront frontiers beyond contemporary academicism, and this, through his individuation.

2. Conscious / Unconscious

Before beginning our development concerning individuation and the psychological principles that follow from it, we must turn to the questions raised by perception. Indeed, perception, whether at the level of consciously or unconsciously perceived elements, lies at the base of all work of individuation. Perception encompasses both what is perceived in reality and what is perceived in the hallucinatory world of dreams and artificial paradises.

For several years now, I have understood that the perception of each thing is unique and inherent to each person. Certainly, there may be resemblances, but there is no perfect equality of perception between one individual and another. I will cite here this passage from *The Doors of Perception*, written by Aldous Huxley:

¹³ «By its very nature every embodied spirit is doomed to suffer and enjoy in solitude. Sensations, feelings, insights, fancies — all these are private and, except through symbols and at second hand, incommunicable. We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves. From family to nation, every human group is a society of island universes.»

What is essential regarding perception, then, is that it is absolutely and totally unique to each individual. An extremely simple example is that of the perception of time. Two individuals in the same room, under the same conditions, may have an absolutely different perception of time. One will find it passing slowly if he is uncomfortable with the situation, and the other quickly if he is at ease or occupied with something.

For my part, I give to perception, and to the symbols that arise from it, a broader definition, one that encompasses the entire sensory spectrum: from sensation to use, and not solely a «pictorial» apprehension. It is true, however, that in Huxley's definition of perception, if art is nothing but the representation of something, then the «spectator» could not fully experience the artist's perception. What must be understood here is that the artist is one of the most individuated beings within the species, and that, for this reason, he is entirely suited to postmodern society.

In keeping with this development, I will cite Huxley once more:

¹⁴ «What the rest of us see only under the influence of mescaline, the artist is congenitally equipped to see all the time. His perception is not limited to what is biologically or socially useful.»

Although this definition of the artist as possessing a congenitally superior perception is flattering, it has not escaped us that artists nonetheless make abundant use of drugs. We know that the use of drugs allows for the enhancement of individuals' perceptive capacities, and that, for artists, this capacity finds itself further heightened under the effect of psychotropic substances, going so far, for certain hallucinogens such as LSD, as a revelation of a mystical order.

I could recount here an experience of this kind, which was one of the sources of my realization of what I would later define as a «sacred individualism.» A summer evening that took a rather different turn when I placed a colored tab beneath my tongue. I found a beach, where I sat cross-legged to meditate. There, on that beach plunged in night, entering a state

¹³ Aldous Huxley, *Les portes de la perception*, Paris, 10-18, p. 16. English: *The Doors of Perception* (Huxley wrote in English; original wording used).

¹⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Les portes de la perception*, Paris, 10-18, pp. 34-35. English: *The Doors of Perception* (original wording).

of meditation, I was able to experience, physically: total interiority, where I became the center of the cosmos and of the universe, where I could draw in, like a black hole, every sensation, color, light, star. I had become the totality of the universe as well as its focal point. Thus, the awareness of my being as the sole and unique tangible reality made me become the very center of the cosmos. Though accompanied by numerous hallucinatory visions, the most important aspect was certainly the sensory dimension of the experience, and even the opening of unexplored fields of my psyche.

This experience contributed to my inner path. I realized that the artist, as a fundamentally introspective being, is thereby individualist to the most extreme degree. He offers others a view of his own inner world, while giving little credit to the gaze of others with regard to his work. The artist thus perceives, on the one hand, reality through another eye, but also his own unconscious with an overdeveloped acuity. Perception is then the central question with regard to the absorption of information by the psyche. The unconscious is formed through the vision of our reality via perceptive mechanisms. There remain, however, the buried elements of the libido and of the collective unconscious, which are perceived differently, through more internalized mechanisms. One might say, rather, that they resurface from within ourselves; in themselves, these elements have always been there.

Having addressed the subject of perception, we must now survey other elements of a psychic order. As for the libido, I will give here a quick, succinct definition, since this concept is fairly well understood and integrated into our society. I would simply say that the libido is not solely of a sexual order, but relates rather to our natural inclinations, as Jung defines it:

¹⁵ «Freud does not declare that ‘everything’ is ‘sexual’; on the contrary, he recognizes the existence of instinctual forces whose nature is not too well known, but to which he has had to attribute the capacity to receive these ‘contributions of libido.’ The hypothetical image underlying this is that of a ‘bundle of drives,’ in which the sexual drive figures as a partial drive. [...] In the history of evolution, it is bodily needs, such as hunger, thirst, sleep, and sexuality, or emotional states, the affects, which constitute the essence of the libido.»

Beyond this libido and the animal forces that dwell within us, we shall turn instead to the more mysterious strata of the unconscious. The deification of artistic capacities is the fruit of the artist’s psyche, of the deep unconscious, that world where he speaks with the gods. That world into which he must plunge in order to find the treasure and fight the dragon. Here we shall address the collective unconscious and its representations as archetypes, once more under the light of Jung:

¹⁵ Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l’âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 239. English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5.

¹⁶ «This observation has not remained an isolated one: it is evidently not a question of inherited representations, but of an innate disposition to form analogous representations, that is to say, of identical universal structures of the psyche which I later called: the collective unconscious. I have called these structures archetypes. They correspond to the biological concept of the *'pattern of behaviour.'*»

The property of the archetype, as a glance at the history of religious phenomena shows, is to have a 'numinous' effect, which means that the subject is seized in the same way as by instinct, and that even this latter can be repressed, sometimes dominated, by this force. It would be superfluous to furnish proof of this.»

This buried world where he may lose himself and sink into madness. And, as defined earlier, find himself possessed by Dionysus, Apollo, and the forces intrinsic to himself. Like the shaman of time immemorial, he seeks the answers of our time in order to represent them to us.

Thus, creation and inspiration arise from our unconscious. Everything is there, buried within us; it is a matter of discovering these things by digging, like an archaeologist of the psyche. I can say, for instance, regarding my own attraction to symbols, that this was already the case since childhood. The buried meaning, this aspect of mystery. I did not rediscover this primordial interest until later, when I finally understood the maxim «become who you are.»

The game, then, is to be able to navigate the unconscious while retaining control. To plunge, body and soul, into the unconscious at the risk of losing oneself in its depths, of being swept up by the great Sea Serpent. A dive in apnea, but one must resurface in order to capture its meaning and integrate it into one's conscious path.

In considering unconscious creation, it is important to recall the role of creation with regard to its display, and thus the fact that the artist remains, nonetheless, aware that he is showing his work to «spectators.» Although we said earlier that the artist did not take the spectator into account in the creation of his work, it must be acknowledged that the artist is nonetheless fully aware of this.

Thus, beyond the mystique of an omniscient artist, one must be fully aware of the artist's conscious character. The artist is fully aware that he is plunging into his unconscious, and thereby performs an act of conscious dreaming. This is why it is legitimate to rationalize the artist's creative process and to be able to theorize it through the process and the cosmogonies that follow from it. The artist, as magician or alchemist, then deploys his esoteric knowledge by showing it. There are thus two faces: the exoteric concept and form, which are explained and shown to the «spectator,» and the esoteric foundation, known to the artist and to a few initiates, which then bears the deep meaning of a work.

One could say that the artist of value is conscious of his unconscious, and is not simply guided by the flow of his projects. The totally unconscious artist would rather fall on the

¹⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l'âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 274. English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5.

side of the outsider artist, and would thus be a case study for psychology, rather than a conscious artist aware of his work, and thus a true thinker. We shall refer here to the figure of William Blake, as defined by Huxley in these terms:

¹⁷ «The mental species to which Blake belonged is fairly widely distributed, even in these days and even among urban populations. The peculiarity of the artist-prophet did not lie in the fact that he actually saw (to quote a line from the descriptive catalogue) ‘those wondrous originals called in the Sacred Scriptures Cherubim.’ It did not lie in the fact that ‘these wondrous originals seen in my visions were some of them one hundred feet in height... and all majestic shadows of contemplative thought.’ It lay solely in his ability to render, in words or (less successfully) in line and colour, some hint at least of a not too uncommon experience. The untalented visionary may perceive an inner reality no less tremendous, beautiful, and significant than the world beheld by Blake; but he lacks altogether the ability to express, in literary or plastic symbols, what he has seen.»[6]

I do not, however, claim to a total consciousness of the act, but at least to a consciousness of the unconscious, and to the establishment of a state of mind allowing for the emergence of the buried elements of the unconscious. In itself, there is the consciousness of plunging into the unconscious, but what emerges from it is not necessarily within the artist’s control.

One must also see that the artistic process can be divided into two phases: conception and production. Certain artists draw from the unconscious starting at the conception stage, then attempt to reproduce what they have discovered there. Others go directly to production without having conceived anything at all; this is a matter of automatic writing. Thus, the unconscious may arise, on the one hand, as an image or symbol in thought during conception, or it may also arise through gesture during the production of a work. In both cases — and it happens that the two overlap — the unconscious indeed plays a preponderant part in artistic work.

He is nonetheless aware of what he is doing; the conscious/unconscious phenomenon is part of his creative process. He surrenders himself to the unconscious in order to draw a teaching from it, and to be able to disseminate it into the world of consciousness. His unconscious lies in the deepest layers, there where the collective unconscious slumbers, there where the secrets of our ancestors lie buried. Through this principle, the artist performs an act of metamorphosis:

¹⁸ «Man cannot, by mere force of reason, turn towards anything except that which is already, in him, a possibility. When the necessity for such a modification arises, the mode of adaptation employed until then, and which is gradually crumbling, is unconsciously compensa-

¹⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Les portes de la perception*, Paris, 10-18, p. 46. English: *The Doors of Perception* (original wording).

¹⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l’âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 394. English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5

ted for by the archetype of another form of adaptation. If consciousness then succeeds in interpreting the constellated archetype in a manner conforming both to its meaning and to the moment, a metamorphosis capable of enduring then appears.»

Only he who succeeds in representing his unconscious within reality is thus an artist. The artist acts; he is actor, he is movement. He is not the mere Brahman; he manages to transfigure his psyche within the present, within the machine. The artist is the saint of the modern movement, museums his cathedrals, places of worship devoted to individuation and to man as a divine figure. The conscious/unconscious principle is now the new path toward the understanding of the inexplicable. This latter is pseudo-scientific, but has the merit of representing our modern society. Since the death of God, it is the psychologist who has become priest, and the psychiatrist, bishop.

How, then, are we to reconcile the artist in his mystical dimension with the precepts of the unconscious and the conscious?

Through individuation, which is the principal phenomenon of the artist's capacity to move back and forth between consciousness and unconsciousness. One may ask oneself whether this capacity is a gift, which would confer even more upon the artist's aura, or whether it is rather a matter of inner work. It is quite probable that it is both. An artist may become a good artist through work, but the master, the genius, is granted innate and inexplicable aptitudes: a grace of the gods. Is this why he has the capacity to enter into direct contact with them through his psyche? This is possible.

3. Sacred Individualism

Having developed the subject of the conscious/unconscious, we now clearly see that the phenomenon of individuation is essential to the artist. I will speak here of a sacred individualism, an enlightened egoism that we must push to the extreme, that is to say, without ever compromising. We create works not for others, but for ourselves. This holds true in every other sphere of life as well: everything is done, inevitably, for ourselves. One must thus become aware of this aspect of man. The well-meaning advice of people outside your reality, stirred up under the guise of sincere charity, is in reality nothing but pity and a will to draw you into the crudest normality. The only advice worth heeding is the following:

Live your own experiences, create your own world, become who you are.

To corroborate this vision, and the practice of a certain enlightened egoism, it is impossible

not to cite the writings of Nietzsche in *Twilight of the Idols* and his *Genealogy of Morals*:

¹⁹ «The best are lacking when egoism begins to be lacking. To choose instinctively what is harmful to oneself, to be lured by ‘disinterested’ motives — that is virtually the formula for *décadence*. ‘Not to seek one’s own advantage’ — that is merely the moral fig leaf for a quite different, namely physiological, state of affairs: ‘I no longer know how to find my own advantage’... Disintegration of the instincts!»

²⁰ «This need to direct one’s gaze outward instead of back to oneself is of the essence of *ressentiment*: in order to exist, slave morality always first needs a hostile external world; it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all — its action is fundamentally reaction.»

Thus the ego, and its abandonment, as preached by certain self-proclaimed mystics of our era, leads far too many of the ignorant astray. These latter, having been co-opted by sects, have taken their *doxa* as the path to salvation. Yet to abandon one’s ego is to return to the animal state, and thus to that of a docile sheep. The only thing that makes us what we are is precisely this ego. I therefore advocate, in total contradiction, the return of the ego as the cornerstone of a civilizational reconstruction.

Coming to the subject of value judgment in art, and thus of what would or would not be aesthetic, we might say at first that this is entirely relative. And yet, starting from enlightened egoism and the total individualism that follows from it for the artist, subjectivity is then over-expressed. Yet this exacerbated subjectivity does not tend toward relativism. Quite the contrary: within the framework of this enlightened egoism, the artist’s extreme subjectivity tends toward a total and singular objectivism. An objectivity proper to the individual, and thus entirely pure, stripped of outside forces. Here, there is no relativity, but a constant struggle among individuals through ideas and creation. This total individualism is the underlying movement of our postmodern society.

This theory of an extreme subjectivism moving toward an extreme objectivism, running entirely counter to the «*new age*» drift from subjectivity toward relativism, traces, in my view, a cycle of values from one extreme to the other. There is an inversion of values.

We will thus say:

An egoism? An oversized ego? Yes, and excessively so. One must pass through the very depths of the ego in order to find the buried treasure of the unconscious. It is through this ego that the artist develops in order to attain sacred individualism, his individuation.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Crépuscule des idoles*, Paris, Folio Essais, p. 78. English: *Twilight of the Idols*.

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Généalogie de la morale*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 82. English: *On the Genealogy of Morals*.

These considerations are, however, not entirely new, and remain linked to a history of humanism, itself doubtless pushed to its own extreme. Already, Hegel, in his *Introduction to Aesthetics*, gave us a definition of the individual as a sacred figure:

²¹ «Thus, for example, the reality of the species has its source in the concrete, free individual; life exists only in the form of individual living beings, the good is only realized through individual men, and all truth exists only for a consciousness that knows, for a spirit that exists for itself.»

He adds, further on in the book:

²² «The content of the gods must notably reveal itself as the content of individuals themselves, such that, on the one hand, the ruling powers appear as individualized in and for themselves, and, on the other, while remaining external to man, present themselves as immanent to his spirit and his character.»

The experience of full consciousness at the individual scale naturally raises the question of whether, after all, I might not be the only one to experience this consciousness. And thus, whether the individuals around me might not be merely a creation of my own psyche. As an individual, I am the measure of this world, and so, if I follow this thread to its end, there would be nothing strictly forbidden to me, all of this being pure projection. Though this thought could well lead to madness, it is quite useful for destroying the moral and psychological barriers of our society. Here, however, it is not a matter of drowning in solipsistic considerations, but rather of using this phenomenon as a force for modifying our reality. Thus, the experience of consciousness as a determinant of reality allows man to free himself from former limits and to attain his full potential. Within the logic of sacred individualism, it is precisely this «full consciousness» of the self that is at stake. Beyond a belief of a mystical order, it is far more a system of thought allowing man to transfigure himself. We might perhaps also speak here of the phenomenon of will, which would be the surpassing of mere passive consciousness, so as to move toward a mechanism of action and the setting into motion of our being, of the self. Modernity brought forth, especially in the West, the individual. Surmodernity will transcend this individual, leading him to surpass mere *Homo sapiens* and to transfigure him. He can thus, through his individuation and his heightened perception, guide the common run of mortals toward a new civilizational cycle. I would even say that it is necessary for every man to become an artist in order to transcend his being.

²¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction à l'esthétique* — Le beau, Paris, Champs, pp. 198-199.
English: *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox.

²² G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction à l'esthétique* — Le beau, Paris, Champs, p. 292.
English: *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox.

III. COSMOLOGY

1. Cycles

I have always believed, as far back as I can remember, in the cyclical nature of the world, in its eternal revolution. A linear development being far too fragmentary and poorly representative of the life I intend to lead. There are even cycles inscribed within cycles, down to microscopic and up to macroscopic dimensions. Creation, for its part, is likewise cyclical: it comes with cycles of growth, golden age, decline, and fall. The artist ceaselessly renews himself over the course of his phases of creation. I advocate for a cyclical nature of creation, of the destruction of aesthetic reference points, and of perpetual rebirth. Thus, within a cosmological logic, we can see this as the representation of cycles at a small scale over the course of the artist's life, but also, more broadly, at the scale of a civilization. Art is a perpetual movement.

From a historical standpoint, we must situate ourselves, from a religious and metaphysical point of view, at the end of the Christian cycle as it concerns the West. Although a few resurgences appear here and there, they are but adaptations of a modernized Protestantism. It may therefore, considering this, be fruitful to ask what new religion will come to crush the ruins of Christianity in order to rebuild a new civilizational foundation. In this sense, conversion to Islam is a potentiality for Europe. Nature abhors a vacuum, and this applies to civilizations. Nonetheless, we will not say there is a total vacuum in the West. We may make the case for the true metaphysical revolution of modernity, namely science. It is clear that the underlying spiritual movement of our modern world lies objectively on the side of the sciences. It is entirely logical today, when speaking of faith, that this latter should perform the work of revealed truth. This is due, evidently, to an operativity and an anchoring in reality that allows for the appearance of modern miracles. It would suffice to add a soul to it, and this movement would doubtless be uncontested. However, in order to surpass these beliefs, I think it rather more interesting to seek the answers deep within ourselves, in the individual. And, as defined earlier, within the conception of an extreme humanism — a sacred individualism.

History has a tendency toward repetition, toward self-repetition. Beliefs and religions are born and die. Some will say that they evolve along a linear perspective, but according to the cyclical vision, there rather persist ersatz fragments of former beliefs that materialize within new ones. In itself, a religion as such collapses upon itself at a given moment. We no longer see authentic Celtic or Egyptian rites, for instance, although certain neo-pagans or lodges would like to revive them. These are, indeed, subterfuges.

We can therefore say that, at the collapse of a civilization or a religion, one observes a detachment of the bonds that individuals had with them. This translates almost systematically into the appearance of one or several syncretisms of different myths and symbols, old and

new. These syncretisms, these agglomerations of values, morals, and signs, form until the appearance of new dogmas, and then of new religions. Let us think back, for instance, to the three great monotheisms. They were, at their appearance, nothing but simple sects, and then transformed over time through the successive contribution of various elements.

This explains, for instance, the proliferation of new beliefs, itself accelerated by the forces of present-day postmodernity. We can, for example, refer, already at the very outset of modernity, to the visionary work of Nietzsche — his *Zarathustra*, which is in itself an attempt at the creation of a new mythical, spiritual, and symbolic syncretism.

These cycles can also be found at a more microscopic level. Take the lives of artists, or even those of individuals. Mental patterns, though different, repeat themselves. To illustrate this with a few trivial examples, we can observe the automobile magnates, Musk, and his counterpart from the past, Ford. Or again Lenin and Robespierre, in their radical visions of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of public salvation. The historical and political similarities are striking. Is this due to man's tendency to repeat himself and to mimic his predecessors? A kind of self-fulfilling prophecy? Or is there, rather, a force of repetition inherent to other elements that sociology could quite readily offer us?

But let us now refocus on the theses put forward earlier. The existential question of aesthetics in the artist has everything to do with value judgments tied to his temporality. This *Zeitgeist* is harmful to creativity insofar as the artist would merely be copying what is already present. Yet the artist's role is precisely to break out of this perpetual reproduction. He must venture to the outer limits of the soul, of the creative process, and of experimentation, in order to create a new and individual aesthetic cosmogony.

2. Inversion of Values and Eternal Return

The tendency toward the repetition of cycles should rather be found within their intrinsic mechanisms: birth, acceleration, acme, decadence, collapse.

There is yet another Nietzschean concept that seems to me extremely important: that of the inversion of values. This latter, within our cyclical logic, is entirely essential. Indeed, it is important to note, as with civilizations, that at the end of a cycle the new one starts out on foundations diametrically opposed to those of the previous one. It would be worthwhile, knowing what «values» means at the civilizational level, to transpose this notion of value to the artistic process. These values, if we take them in an aesthetic sense, represent more than a mere moral judgment, but rather a qualitative vision of the representation of an aesthetic state of affairs.

We can, for instance, admit aesthetic values common to classicism: respect for proportion, antique themes, the pursuit of figurative realism, and so on. Taking the opposite in terms of value, we can take Impressionism: the representation of sensation, the flight from realism, abstract representation. I could likewise cite here Le Corbusier on the subject of modern architecture:

²³ «If we place ourselves squarely in front of the past, we find that the old codification of architecture, overburdened by articles and regulations for forty centuries, ceases to interest us; it no longer concerns us; there has been a revision of values; there has been a revolution in the concept of architecture.»

It is here that we might invoke the phenomenon of revolution: revolution in its sense of overturning, of inversion of values. Thus, within our logic, the cyclical flow of time does not necessarily occur peacefully, but indeed through the eternal struggle of opposites, of forces at war with one another. These forces can be visible within artistic work, or at least apprehensible. This is why we will later develop the principle of accelerationism in the sense of the voluntary acceleration of the decadence of a cycle, in order to set a new one in motion, one diametrically opposed to it.

Having introduced this notion of the inversion of values, let us now take up another Nietzschean principle of a cyclical nature. We will transpose it afterward to the inversion of values. This principle is introduced by Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*:

²⁴ «What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence — even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!’ Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, ‘Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?’ would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to long for nothing more fervently than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?»

²³ Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, Paris, Champs Flammarion, pp. ²⁴⁰–²⁴¹.
English: *Toward an Architecture*.

²⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Le gai savoir*, Livre IV, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 341.
English: *The Gay Science*.

This is the concept of the eternal return, one of the founding principles of Nietzsche's thought. The source of the acceptance of life. A pure psychological hack capable of leading to the fulfillment of one's destiny. We shall take up this powerful principle and develop it in its cyclical nature. But before that, it is important for us to consider its transfigurative force.

Here, the eternal return, as we have understood it, allows the individual, through the intermediary of the demon, to project himself into infinite and unchanged cycles of reincarnation. Through this understanding, the individual can put his own life into perspective and know whether he has lived it as he ought to have, as he wished to. This illumination is made possible by the questioning of our own life as a potential eternal recommencement. The eternal return carries a quite particular force with regard to the will and to *amor fati*. I therefore make of this philosophical principle one of the foundations of my thought.

Yet we might rightly say that the eternal return would be opposed to the principle of the inversion of values. The eternal return, which must be the identical reproduction of what has already happened, would imply that the phenomenon of the inversion of values would also reproduce itself eternally, identically. We have, however, seen clearly earlier that the inversion of values is a cycle, but one acting upon values, and therefore incapable of reproducing itself identically. We thus have here an essential contradiction within Nietzsche's cyclical logic. We shall see that this contradictory tension is fertile ground for understanding the cosmological nature of cycles.

The eternal return is a phenomenon of a far more omnipotent order than the inversion of values. This latter is not regulated by positive or negative values, nor by the judgment that follows from them. The eternal return is the engine, the primordial energy of change. In developing these ideas of the eternal return and of the inversion of values as revolution, this opens us to a more complex cyclical vision, tied to René Guénon's theories on the Kali Yuga, and to a far more extensive and cosmic vision. Thus, in order to visualize this cyclical philosophy of creation, it will be important not to have a merely two-dimensional vision, but indeed a four-dimensional one.

3. Cosmogony of the Sacred Individual

Having introduced the basic principles of our cyclical vision of the world, we will now connect it to the question of the artist's cosmogony and to the creation of a moving world. As we developed further above, in order to properly understand what follows, we must return to the concept of sacred individualism. The artist, the individual, is thereby at the center of our inquiries and constitutes the sole metric of reality. The individual and the self are the sole measure of reference in what follows. Developed at the archetypal level, the

artist is a creator of worlds. He engenders a cosmogony ²⁵.

A cosmogony, that is to say, the creation of the universe, of a world, the creation of a personal and mythological narrative, or even the appearance of the Big Bang. We understand cosmogony here as the process of creating a creative universe. The universe, the cosmos, representing by allegory works, artistic movements, and ideas. Thus, the process of creation is a cosmogony, and cosmogony is a process.

This raises a question we shall answer directly in order to clarify our point: that of the difference between perceiving the world as it is or creating it oneself. There is here an opposition between, on the one hand, an existing world to which our perception applies, and, on the other, a world created entirely by our perception.

From our point of view, the world is created by ourselves, and therefore there is an infinity of worlds for each individual. But at the same time, only one world, for it is our own, and it is created by ourselves as well as everything found within it. Here, we can again cite the concept of total objectivism, which is no longer a subjectivity, but an extreme individualization situated at a point of junction between these two concepts.

We must then proceed, for what follows, from the principle that the artist is a creator of worlds. Or at least the artist as the personification of the modern hero — half man, half god. We may cite Jung once again here, to characterize the divine inclination of the individual as hero, and thus the nature of the artist within our development:

²⁶ «Thus the hero myth is an unconscious drama that appears only in projection, comparable to the events of Plato's cave parable. The hero himself appears as a being who possesses something more than the human character. He is characterized, from the outset, allusively, as a god. He is, psychologically, an archetype of the self; his divine nature thus expresses that the self is likewise 'numinous,' that is to say, almost divine, or that it partakes of the divine nature.»

We thus define the artist here as a quasi-divine hero and creator of worlds through individuation. In order to represent the schema of this cosmology ²⁷, we shall need to return in greater depth to the principle of the eternal return and its tension with the inversion of values.

The eternal return, as explained earlier, is the omnipotent mechanism of the world; the inversion of values, through excess and the reaction it engenders, is another phenomenon, but one inscribed within the more global mechanism of the eternal return.

²⁵ Cosmogony: the process of creating a universe, a world, or a personal and mythological narrative; by extension, the creative process of the artist who engenders a universe. (Arthur Bitsch's own definition.)

²⁶ Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l'âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 645. English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5.

²⁷ Cosmology: the universe as such, its structure and organization, symbolically represented by works, artistic movements, and ideas. (Arthur Bitsch's own definition.)

At the scale of man, if we reflect metaphysically, the eternal return would be the perpetual reincarnation of being, the temporality and the single soul that we must live eternally. We can also say that the individual seeks to be reborn. It is, in itself, in his nature to aspire to immortality through rebirth. Symbolically expressed by Jung through the return to the mother, which can be understood psychologically through the struggle against one's inner demons, within Jung's incestuous logic. This, in order to be reborn as a «regenerated» hero. In itself, the aspiration toward man's rebirth through sacrifice is of a divine and solar nature:

²⁸ «The meaning of the mythic cycle awakened here is clear: it is the aspiration to recover rebirth through return into the maternal womb, that is to say, to become immortal like the sun.»

There lies the global and cosmic phenomenon of rebirth. As concerns the eternal return, as proposed through the demon invoked by Nietzsche, rebirth here is unchanged.

We see, nonetheless, that over the course of our lives as individuals our values change, invert themselves cyclically. Inscribed, then, within this immanent cycle are smaller circles of birth, acceleration, acme, decadence, and collapse. I might be inclined toward classical art in my early years, but completely change my vision and incline instead toward the total abstraction of minimalism at another period of my life. There exist countless examples, at the individual level, of our contradictions and our inversions of values; they are part of our lives.

Thus, the difficulty with this question, from a point of view of «belief,» is that if the cycle of the eternal return were to repeat itself, but in a different manner, then the power of will that it creates would be entirely annihilated. We have the example of Hinduism, which prefers to believe in a reincarnation of the soul after death, but into another body, another incarnation. Here there would be a loss of vital momentum, and already a vision of a redemptive paradise. Indeed, the thought that one will relive one's life indefinitely, in an infinite cycle, and this in exactly the same manner, is the very foundation of the logic of *amor fati*. In itself, you have but one destiny; you will not be reincarnated into something else; paradise is a lie.

However, from a more macroscopic point of view, and within a civilizational or cosmological logic, that is to say, that of a world, we can clearly see that there are similar cycles, but diametrically opposed ones. Take, for example, the fall of the Roman Empire, or at least its golden age, in comparison to the golden age of the Middle Ages during the thirteenth century. Society, beliefs, art, and architecture could not be more opposed. Fragments of the past do of course persist, but the very foundations of Roman thought disappear. One must

²⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l'âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 357. English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5.

wait for the Renaissance and the rise of the Western empires to see an attempt to reactivate the values of ancient Rome. These, however, could not be the same as Roman values. They were extinguished with the fall of the Empire. Taking this example of the confrontation between Roman civilization and the civilization of the Middle Ages, we do indeed have here an inversion of values. The cyclical logic then appears decorrelated from that of the eternal return. At the civilizational level, nothing reproduces itself in exactly the same manner.

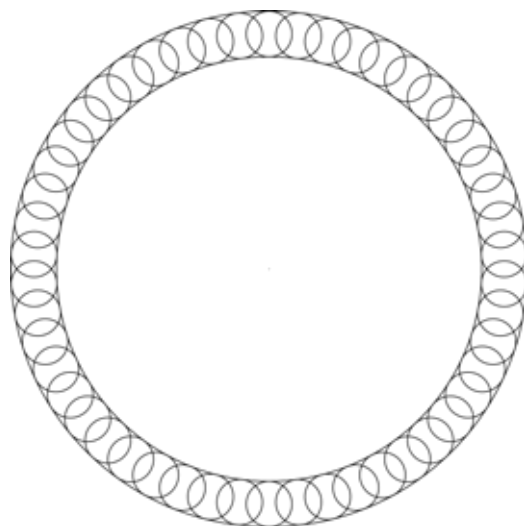
It is here that our principle of the sacred individual as creator of worlds becomes central. This latter is the higher cycle of the cosmos. The individual universe is therefore eternal and unchanged throughout all the cycles of existence, an eternal recommencement. This apparent dichotomy between the individual cycle and the civilizational cycle can, however, be resolved. To do so, we must consider that the cycle of the eternal return of the sacred individual is corollary to the cosmic cycle; the civilizational cycle, on the other hand, is corollary to the cycle of the variations of values over the course of an individual's life. There is, therefore, totality with regard to the eternal return, and fragmentation with regard to the inversion of values.

And so, to describe this succinctly:

The eternal return and sacred individualism represent the great, infinite, omnipotent, omnipresent, immanent cycle.

The inversion of values, meanwhile, represents the lower cycles.

To picture this, let us start from a two-dimensional diagram, in order to be more explicit:



A great cycle
A great circle
Within which are inscribed
Other cycles
Other circles
The great one is infinite
The great one is unchanged
The others are multiple
The others repeat

4. Complex Cycle

We have seen it: the cyclical definition of the world is complex. This logic of the great cycle and of the lower cycles inscribed within it is still taking shape in my mind as I write these lines, but this conceptual tension carries within it a metaphysical revelation.

Let us start, then, from the individual: we said that he is the center of his own universe by virtue of his perception. Because of this, the eternal return of the individual represents the cycle of the center of the universe. This latter is eternal and unchanged.

As for the lower cycles, at the level of the individual's life, they are the phases of life with their highs and lows, but they repeat within the same pattern. These cycles differ, but tend to reproduce themselves. This is precisely through the force of the great cycle and of the eternal return. The lower cycles, for their part, are governed by the principle of the inversion of values.

This is why I said earlier, from a point of view of belief, that the great cycle and the eternal return possess a metaphysical dimension and represent a permanent, eternal, and, above all, omnipresent and omnipotent movement.

The lower cycles, we have explained at the level of the individual. They are also observable at the macroscopic level, in the history of civilizations and in the destruction and appearance of worlds within the universe. At the cosmic scale, the great cycle repeats itself indefinitely, and this while remaining unchanged and immutable. At the end of our universe, once it has completed its phase of eternal expansion, this universe will then be reborn, and the great cycle will resume with the same logics, on an infinite scale.

*

To shed light on these points, we shall study and comment on the complex logic of René Guénon on cycles. This will then help us to truly schematize the cosmology of the artist. Guénon, a metaphysician and esotericist of the twentieth century, developed a profound thought on universal tradition. Here, we shall be particularly interested in his cyclical vision of time and of History at the cosmic level. This latter is strongly influenced by Eastern traditions.

To this end, we shall study here a dense but essential passage for understanding the development that follows. It is drawn from the first chapter of *The Crisis of the Modern World*:

²⁹ «Hindu doctrine teaches that the duration of a human cycle, to which it gives the name Manvantara, is divided into four ages, which mark as many phases of a gradual obscuring of primordial spirituality; these are the very periods that the traditions of Western antiquity, for their part, designated as the ages of gold, silver, bronze, and iron. We are presently in the fourth age, the Kali-Yuga or 'dark age,' and we have been in it, it is said, for more than six thousand years already, that is to say since an epoch well prior to any known to 'classical' history. Since then, the truths that were once accessible to all men have become increasingly hidden and difficult to attain; those who possess them are fewer and fewer, and, if the treasure of 'non-human' wisdom, prior to all ages, can never be lost, it wraps itself in ever more impenetrable veils, which conceal it from view and beneath which it is extremely difficult to discover it. This is why there is, everywhere, under various symbols, mention of something that has been lost, in appearance at least and with respect to the outer world, and which those who aspire to true knowledge must recover; but it is also said that what is thus hidden will become visible again at the end of this cycle, which will be, at the same time, by virtue of the continuity that links all things together, the beginning of a new cycle.

But, it will doubtless be asked, why must cyclical development be accomplished thus in a descending direction, going from the higher to the lower, which, as will easily be noted, is the very negation of the idea of 'progress' as the moderns understand it? It is because the development of any manifestation necessarily implies an ever greater distancing from the principle from which it proceeds; starting from the highest point, it necessarily tends downward, and, like heavy bodies, it tends there with an ever increasing speed, until it finally meets a point of arrest. This fall could be characterized as a progressive materialization, for the expression of the principle is pure spirituality; we say the expression, and not the principle itself, for the latter cannot be designated by any of the terms that seem to indicate any opposition whatsoever, being beyond all oppositions.

[...]

What we have just said of the development of manifestation presents a view which, while accurate on the whole, is nonetheless too simplified and schematic, in that it might suggest that this development occurs in a straight line, in a single direction and without oscillation of any kind; the reality is far more complex. Indeed, it is necessary to envisage, in all things, as we already indicated earlier, two opposing tendencies, one descending and the other ascending, or, to use another mode of presentation, one centrifugal and the other centripetal; and from the predominance of one or the other proceed two complementary phases of manifestation, one of distancing from the principle, the other of return toward the principle, which are often compared symbolically to the movements of the heart or to the two phases of breathing. Although these two phases are usually described as successive,

²⁹ René Guénon, *La crise du monde moderne*, Paris, Kult, pp. 21-24. English: *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Marco Pallis, Arthur Osborne, and Richard C. Nicholson.

it must be understood that, in reality, the two tendencies to which they correspond always act simultaneously, though in varying proportions; and it sometimes happens, at certain critical moments when the descending tendency seems on the point of definitively prevailing in the general course of the world, that a special action intervenes to reinforce the opposing tendency, so as to reestablish a certain balance, at least a relative one, such as the conditions of the moment may allow, and thus to bring about a partial recovery, by which the movement of the fall may seem temporarily halted or neutralized.³⁰

It is easy to understand that these traditional data, of which we must confine ourselves to sketching a very summary overview, make possible conceptions quite different from all the attempts at a 'philosophy of history' in which the moderns indulge, and far more vast and profound. But we do not intend, for the moment, to go back to the origins of the present cycle, nor even, more simply, to the beginnings of the Kali-Yuga; our intentions relate, directly at least, only to a much more limited domain, to the final phases of this same Kali-Yuga. One can, indeed, within each of the great periods of which we have spoken, distinguish further different secondary phases, which constitute so many subdivisions of it; and, each part being in some way analogous to the whole, these subdivisions reproduce, so to speak, on a smaller scale, the general course of the great cycle into which they are integrated; but, here again, a complete investigation of the modalities of application of this law to the various particular cases would carry us well beyond the scope we have set for this study. We shall mention only, to conclude these preliminary considerations, some of the last particularly critical epochs through which humanity has passed, those that fall within the period customarily called 'historical,' because it is indeed the only one truly accessible to ordinary or 'profane' history; and this will lead us quite naturally to what must be the proper object of our study, since the last of these critical epochs is none other than the one constituting what is called modern times.»

Before diving into the heart of Guénon's thought and transposing it to our development, I will define a few fundamental notions. We must take into account that Guénon's cyclical logic is strongly inspired by Hindu cosmogony. For him, we are presently in the fourth and last age of the great cycle, that which is called the «Kali Yuga,» or the Dark Age. Here, truths are increasingly hidden behind symbols, for we are ever further removed from the golden age, the primordial age. However, for Guénon, the end of the Kali Yuga is near, and the revelation of former truths will become possible through the recommencement of the great cycle. Thus, in Guénon's thought, contrary to the idea of progress, truth lies at the beginning of the cycle — at its birth. It is easy for us to draw parallels with the concepts we developed earlier concerning archetypes and the sacred individual.

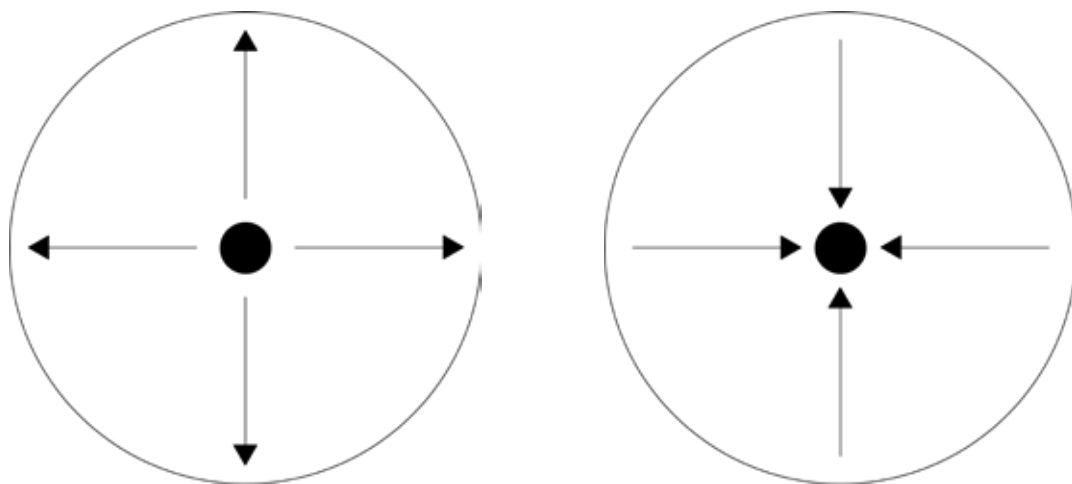
³⁰ This relates to the function of «divine preservation,» which, in the Hindu tradition, is represented by Vishnu, and more particularly to the doctrine of the Avatâras, or «descents,» of the divine principle into the manifested world, which we cannot, of course, undertake to develop here. (Guénon's own footnote, reproduced within the quoted passage.)

Setting these considerations aside, let us instead turn to the truly cyclical nature of his definition and to its functioning, its movement.

Guénon manages, through his metaphysical theory as well as the ancestral knowledge accumulated over the course of his life, to arrive at a rather interesting schematization of the cycle. There is here a truly multidimensional vision of cycles.

The singular system I am referring to is that of a centrifugal and centripetal vision of the cycle, comparable to a heart or to breathing. There is, then, a focal point of the cycle. For Guénon, the focal point is the original truth, or the golden age. From our point of view, we shall represent this focal point as being the individual, the self. Here, a diagram to represent this:

This system represents a centrifugal and centripetal vision of the cycle, comparable to the heart and to breathing.



Either we draw closer to the original truth, or we move further away from it. One might say here that this resembles the system of the inversion of values. One moves away from, or draws closer to, an original truth through the variation between poles of value. We shall easily understand, once again, that, adapted to our system, this focal point represents the individual, the original golden age being, for its part, the representation of the collective unconscious. Everything is within us, and we are, or at least I am, the focal point of existence.

Guénon also insists on the fact that there are ruptures, but that there is never discontinuity, for the cycles link together causally. This immanent character of the cycle, and its causal

character, connect us by analogy to the eternal return. The eternal return, as an omnipotent cycle, is that of destiny. The eternal return is thus entirely causal and, once again, unchanged. This corroborates our theory of the eternal return as a superior force, the sacred individual as the focal point of the universe and its creator. The forces of the inversions of values, meanwhile, are lower cycles animated by the fundamental power of the eternal return and of the individual. Thus, this vision can be applied to a true cosmology, a universe in itself.

To summarize all of this:

The great cycle represents the eternal return, the sacred individual, and the cosmos. The lower cycles represent the inversion of values, the cycles of life, and civilizational cycles.

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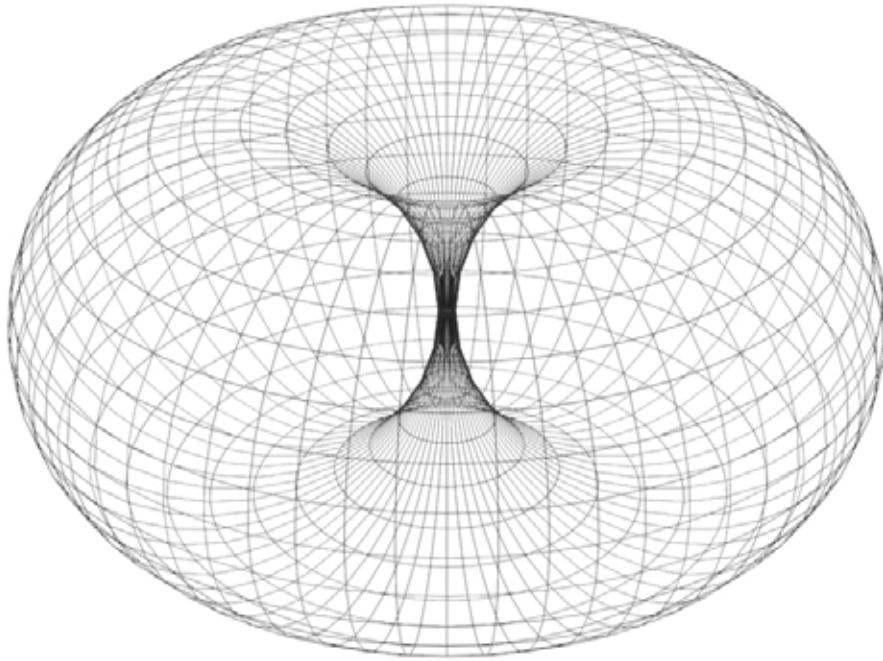
With this development, and thanks to the invaluable help of Guénon in understanding complex cycles, the schema of a torus in motion might be the best representation of this universal, and yet entirely individual, force. Indeed, with the addition of Guénon's centrifugal and centripetal logic, this would correspond to the image we drew of the great circle and the lower cycles, but this time within a four-dimensional vision.

We thus have here the representation of a torus, a universal black hole, the representation of a complex cycle. It would be interesting to be able to animate it on these pages, in order to have its complete representation as eternal movement.

Within this schematization of the black hole of existence, the universe expands to the point of causality where it contracts upon itself in order to be eternally resurrected. It turns, in the same manner, indefinitely upon itself, through the force of gravitation caused by its center. The individual is the center of this black hole, the center of the force setting the universe into motion. This cosmos contracting and returning upon itself indefinitely, this cosmos likewise turning indefinitely, and this under the same conditions.

The sacred individual, the eternal return, the inversion of values represent the primordial forces of creation. This is the metaphysics of the artist and of art as perpetual movement. It tends toward an understanding of the individual as primordial force. This metaphysical revelation, and this image of the universal and eternal cycle centered on the individual, open for us the doors of creation. It opens for us the potentialities of destiny through its unveiling.

We shall now learn how to make use of this metaphysics, this cosmological mysticism. We shall see that this latter can integrate an operative force, an operativity through the process of creation.



IV. OPERATIVITY

1. Metaphysics of the Creative Process

There is, nonetheless, something divine in the principle of creation. Is this the doing of the mere individual, or does something lie above him?

Once again, I find Jung's definition of the collective unconscious highly attractive, notably this projection of man as an extension of the longer history of his species. The collective unconscious and its symbols would, in this view, be the resultant of the consciousnesses of individuals of the past. We can also give a more metaphysical reading of this collective unconscious, which would be the aspect of our psyche most closely tied to a divine reality, as defined through the use of archetypes. These components are thus the resultant of the unconscious, especially the collective unconscious, and have nothing to do with the life of the individual.

From a scientific point of view, a purely material and biological one, this remains difficult to prove. But given the great concordance of the cases studied, it is entirely probable that this could truly exist. I would add, to conclude, that the world cannot be explained solely by way of science: there remain metaphysical universes that surpass us.

Of course, the question of the existence of God, or that of a higher power, is not evaded, and it is a problem impossible to answer. In its formalization, at least the Western one, this power being omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, the very fact of its conceptualization forbids denying its existence.

God nonetheless remains indeed a human creation: the conceptualization of chance, of the inexplicable, of the miraculous. Man is thus truly at the center of our reflections here, as is the individual, raised to the height of God, or else denying his existence.

Returning to the figure of the artist, the creation of a work is the fruit of necessity: the necessity of escaping one's condition as a man, and of thereby hoping, through the projection of the self, to attain a kind of future transcendence, whether physical or metaphysical.

Within this logic, what is called «magic» in ancient traditions, and even more contemporary ones, is in reality the modification of one's unconscious, the transcendence of the unconscious toward consciousness. Magic resides within the individual and modifies the individual; following these transformations, he is capable of sculpting reality. In sum, what we call magical or transcendent is in reality the faculty that the «magician» would have of modifying his state of consciousness in order to be able to apply his will to this reality. It is thus merely a matter of voluntary inner change, while always remaining entirely connected to the material principles of the body.

We shall see this later: I wish to speak here of an operativity of artistic concepts, of the philosophy of the eternal return and of the sacred individual, in order to be able to improve

one's being and modify one's environment.

The mystical aspect of the artist across all cultures is fundamentally due to his way of thinking. When I say way of thinking, I mean precisely the process of thinking, the one that allows for the flash of genius. A thing entirely miraculous to those not initiated into creation, but explicable from a metapsychological point of view.

It is the way in which the artist's psyche behaves that partakes of the miraculous, the idea coming from an elsewhere called the unconscious by psychology, a resurgence of information contained within the personal, but also the collective, unconscious. Thus, meditation, presleep phases, and experimentation with drugs help facilitate the appearance of these flashes. Being able to navigate the border between the conscious and the unconscious helps facilitate inspiration. It is therefore possible to direct one's creativity, and thereby to gain a hand over one's creative process. One might equally say that certain artists prefer to be consciously unconscious, so as to let their inspiration speak without curbing it with moral, social, or cultural considerations. As for the case of totally unconscious artists, we have already discussed the art brut artist (Outsider Art). I would say, then, that the artist must be conscious of his work, at the risk of being either a madman or a non-artist.

As will be understood, we shall speak here of the notion of the creative process. Process comes from the Latin *procedere*: *pro* («forward») and *cedere* («to walk, to go»), that is to say, the idea of a movement directed toward something. As we have seen earlier, we have committed ourselves to a cyclical metaphysics that is, in itself, a perpetual movement toward infinity. We shall take the process here, then, as the definition of being in movement — creation and art are in perpetual movement.

Let us take the different periods, at the individual level, among artists: Klimt, academic at first, then influenced by Symbolism before the advent of his golden period; De Chirico, moving from metaphysical painting to Neoclassicism; Picasso, with his Blue and Rose periods, followed by his African period and then Cubism; Braque, from Analytic Cubism to Synthetic Cubism; or again Soulages, from gestural abstraction to Outrenoir, and so on. These are the result of often sudden shifts in the understanding of one's work, or of the temporal context. Thus, the artist is in constant movement, in constant search. His work is manifold and spans different strata of his life. We shall see that, within the same macroscopic and microscopic logic as that of the complex cycles, we have the possibility of a true operativity of the metaphysical and psychological logics discussed above. Thus, the artist in movement can truly become a magician, an alchemist of his own work, of his own world.

2. The Creative Process

We shall now turn our attention to the artist as an individual, and thus to his creative process. The internal process, what we might call, using a contemporary and rather barbaric language, conception. This interests us in particular, and especially the moment of the appearance of inspiration. Why, for instance, during meditation, or shortly before sleep, do ideas tend more to arise like flashes, and is it possible to bring these about deliberately?

The process, as we have seen, is in fact the idea of movement and change toward something. The creative process proceeds from an unconscious digestion of outer elements toward their coming into consciousness, whether through the creation, the making, or the conception of something that then appears to the creator. The process is thus all of this movement intrinsic to the artist, a metamorphosis of the psyche. The process, I take it as being constant. When one speaks of a «result,» it is commonly understood that this must be a production of the mind, or else a formal production. Yet I hold the process to be a perpetual movement of change, a constant revolution of being and of the unconscious.

The process can then be understood as a cosmogony of the creation of an inner world. One can sense the advent of a new cycle of creation at the start of the process, leading to the completion of something. This same thing will come to be destroyed psychologically, in order to begin a new cycle of creation. This process, I would call cyclical, made of acceleration, acme, decadence, and destruction. These cycles, however, answer one another across time, and, during the destruction of past creations, ruins remain, artifacts useful for understanding the new paradigms of cycles to come.

This phenomenon, unconscious at first glance, can be made conscious in order to shape and accelerate these revolutions. This perpetual revolution in art is the very basis of creativity, and thus of the artist's work. The goal is to plunge oneself fully into this cosmogony, so as to create worlds, destroy them, remodel them, and this in an infinite process.

The artist, and the process of his creation, first arise from the idea, from the will to unveil the mind. From this sudden flash, the creator attempts to express it through matter. In this sense, the creative process is the transmutation of soul into body. This phenomenon can be read in two ways.

First, the capture of a context, of «the spirit of the times,» by the artist's body; or, second, the capture of a deeper and more internal unconscious proper to the artist. Here, we return to the notion of perception. Then, following this digestion of information by the mind, the idea appears, and finally the transmutation of the idea into the medium.

Thus, the creative process begins with this capture of information, its digestion, its refi-

nement by the mind. The idea then arises, which may seem sudden, but which, in reality, results from this period of gestation. The idea is already present deep within the artist, the creator. The expression used by writers, «the blank page,» is, in sum, the expression of an idea not yet ripe enough to appear. One must therefore either give it time to appear, or else activate and accelerate it by going in search of «inspiration.»

As for the possibility of accelerating this process, this is often done through the experience of intense sensations: inebriation, metaphysical revelation, bodily overexposure, extreme sports. We could cite many other examples, but it is true that most will relate to a sensory and physical experience. Taking sex, for instance, as a means of acceleration, we might say it is interesting because it tends to bring us into direct communication with the libido, and thus with our most natural instincts. With sex, there is a redemptive return to the body. I would say that the will to accelerate the process thus comes through the pursuit of an aesthetic revelation. Aesthetic is understood here in its broadest sense, and not solely a visual one. Aesthetic is everything that tends toward transcendence: toward the pursuit of an extreme, whether in feeling or in physical and sensory manifestation. The question of the aesthetic here has more to do with its sense of an incredible revelation, a flash of genius, an artistic orgasm. When an idea is taking shape, it is not uncommon, as an artist, to feel a kind of madness seize hold of us, a seething that precedes creation. An intimately carnal reaction; there is something of the order of the Dionysian experience in it, and all of this precedes the delivery, the creation of a work.

During intense phases of reflection, of the digestion of the elements mentioned above, the cerebral mechanism absorbs the artist's perception and releases it as symbols. This is why meditative mechanisms are important, in order to bring these symbols forth from our interiority. Here, I might refer, for instance, to the meditative phase of sleep, the dream. It is possible to reach a stage of semi-consciousness of the dream through the presleep phases. The images stored in the unconscious then manifest themselves:

³¹ «Modern man could hardly believe that the dream is caused by a god existing outside ourselves, nor that the dream can prophesy the future. Translated into psychological language, however, the ancient conception becomes far more comprehensible, namely: the dream arises from a part of the soul unknown to us, and busies itself with preparing the coming day and its events.

According to the old belief, the divinity, or the demon, speaks to the sleeping man in a symbolic language, and the dream-interpreter must translate this enigmatic language. In modern language, this means that the dream is a series of images, apparently contradictory and absurd; but it contains a material of thoughts which, once translated, presents a clear meaning.»

This cerebral mechanism shows that creation, at least at its prenatal stage, is purely intrin-

³¹ Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l'âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 53.
English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5.

sic. We see, then, with the example of meditation through conscious dreaming, that it is possible to place oneself in the conditions for the appearance of this spark, of the genius buried within us. And so, for this reason, the artist is not entirely unconscious; he can direct his inspiration. He is also conscious when he produces a work, or when he presents it to the world. He performs an act of showing his self. Intrinsic art is the self, the self at its most extreme level.

For this aesthetic revelation and the appearance of the idea, it is essential to seize it as quickly as possible, to transcribe it in haste, at the risk of seeing this flash dissipate like thunder in a valley. Forgetting produces this dissipation, and comes to make the idea disappear or distort it in its pure state. Thus, these flashes function in the same way as a dream. The dream seems real during sleep; upon waking it seems clear and tangible to us; let half an hour pass and it has already evaporated. Past noon, nothing remains of it. It is therefore essential to take note of these waking dreams that aesthetic revelations are.

We can therefore say that the active phase of the creative process begins with the capture of the «dream.» The capture of the idea, of the dream, precedes its execution through a medium. This is why the sketch, or the rough draft, is essential for the artist, acting as an aide-mémoire and allowing one to recall the appearance of an idea in all its clarity. The basic sketch is an evocation of a clear and precise idea that appeared to the artist's soul. Thus, and this is commonly accepted among artists, whether a work is created quickly or slowly makes no sense once one takes the active phase of creation into account. A work created «quickly» is, in the end, often the result of a long unconscious process, of a lengthy digestion, which then appears suddenly under the forms given to it by the artist. The whole matter is to trust one's intuition, one's inner path. It results from the unconscious, which represents a truth: that of the self.

As for overthinking, this latter constrains us to inaction. Failing to materialize one's idea through a medium, whatever it may be, does not make us artists. It makes us thinkers stuck within the world of ideas, incapable of achieving the fusion of body and mind. One must therefore absolutely be in movement, be in action, in order to create. Mental isolation inevitably confines us to a circular logic of rumination. One must, as much as possible, think by acting, by doing. As with the writing of a text that reveals itself progressively as its author is writing it. Of course, a plan is a good ally for carrying out one's work more effectively. But it must not define the work itself.

Thus, the aesthetic revelation, this flash of unequaled clarity, can be used by the artist as the plan itself. The unconscious having already, beforehand, digested the information resulting from the flash. The artist can trust this mental image. His creation will become more precise during its making, as well as in the definition and understanding of the concept behind this primordial idea. This is why, during the phase of making a work, of physical production, the fundamental idea may come to evolve. Marcel Duchamp, too, saw the creative process as a movement that must change state over the course of the act of creation:

³² «In the creative act, the artist goes from intention to realization through a chain of totally subjective reactions. His struggle toward the realization is a series of efforts, pains, satisfaction, refusals, decisions, which also cannot and must not be fully self-conscious, at least on the esthetic plane.

The result of this struggle is a difference between the intention and its realization, a difference which the artist is not aware of.

Consequently, in the chain of reactions accompanying the creative act, a link is missing. This gap, representing the inability of the artist to express fully his intention, this difference between what he intended to realize and did realize, is the personal 'art coefficient' contained in the work.

In other words, the personal 'art coefficient' is like an arithmetical relation between the unexpressed but intended and the unintentionally expressed.»

We shall repeat ourselves, but the creative process is movement, and so, during the ideation and the production of a work, this latter is likewise movement, process. There is thus no failure in the modification of the primordial image during its transmutation into reality: constant movement is part of creation.

Finally, although there are exceptions, the final name of a work is often given at the end of its production, when the artist decides to «stop.» Knowing when to stop is a problem in itself, but here we proceed from the principle that, for the work to be unveiled to the world, the artist has decided upon its finality. Of course, the artist may also decide never to stop a work, and this latter would then become eternal process and total representation of the artistic process.

But, without straying too far, let us return to the finality of the work before its display to the world, once it is «finalized.» The artist gives a name to his work. To name something is to give it life, to animate it. Thus, in naming a work, the artist gives it his intention, or rather gives life to a myth buried within the work. Naming carries a magical and ritual connotation. In giving a name to his work, as with the Golem, we animate matter. There is birth within the material world. In giving form to matter, the process is not simply a pure production of the mind. The process is attached to materiality, for the artist is attached, in the flesh, to this materiality. He gives life.

³² Marcel Duchamp, *Duchamp du signe*, Paris, Champs, pp. 206-207.

English: «The Creative Act,» lecture delivered at the Convention of the American Federation of Arts, Houston, April 1957 (Duchamp spoke in English; original wording used).

3. Sacrifice, Inversion of Values, and Acceleration

The artist, in plunging headlong into the creative process, and thus into this infinite cycle, makes the choice of danger and insecurity by devoting himself fully to his work. Few are the chosen ones who attain glory within their lifetime. But, as specified at the beginning of this work, the artist does not seek recognition. One must embrace one's insecurity, for it allows an unequalled freedom to undertake. The artist, as archetype and as individual, is the path of freedom. Here, we call for an ode to creativity, to the becoming-artist as a path of liberation from moral logics.

To nourish his creativity, the artist needs sacrifice and confinement in order to give birth to a work. And, paradoxically, he also needs to live experiences and to leave his ivory tower in order to inseminate his mind. There may also be a correlation between mood (personal psychology at a given moment) and the cycle of creation, though this would give a romantic image of the tortured artist.

We can, however, say that this phenomenon is too fragmentary. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that mood is negative or positive, but that it is its intensity that prevails. In a Nietzschean sense, the stronger the moments, the more creativity is bound to be stirred. We may return here to the Dionysian figure and its excesses. Thus, it would be more accurate to seek the will to power, or else a certain *élan vital*, in order to be able to fully feel the emotions of a moment and, thereby, inseminate one's mind, and thus one's creativity. Here, we would have the image of the Dionysian artist, turned toward extreme sensory experiences, and capable, even, during the creation of a work, of entering a kind of trance. On the other side, we have the image of the Apollonian artist, who would be in a kind of temperance and calculation before the work. I think that, as an artist, it is entirely feasible to control one's Dionysian and Apollonian inclinations in the direction of the creation of a total work.

There are, however, a few dangers in this shaping of our own minds. Madness in the artist is understandable in the sense that he grants himself intellectual autonomy to such a degree, in order to experiment and discover new things and concepts, that he can sink into abysses so deep that nothing more ties him to the normative reality of his contemporaries. One should, however, distinguish between two types of «madness.» The one that leads to the destruction of morality, which is not problematic in the sense of a discovery of new fields of understanding, and which leads, in this case, to a new civilizational paradigm. And, second, the more problematic kind of madness that leads to the destruction of the physical barriers of reality. This latter, in that it turns us away from physical reality, is the most dangerous for the soul. It comes closer, more directly, to schizophrenia in its character of detachment from reality.

Nonetheless, returning to these definitions, it is precisely because the artistic process tends toward madness that it is of interest. Thus, the artist is in constant combat not to sink, all while experimenting with every corner of the human soul. He must embrace this madness while fighting to keep his consciousness intact. We return here to the psychological considerations of plunging into the unconscious. In a certain sense, one must fully embrace danger in order to influence the course of one's creation.

I will take a personal example. During a phase of excessive introspection, I noted the following at the time:

«As I have been able to observe over the past few weeks, we can say that there has been a certain mental cracking, due above all to excessive introspection and a great lack of action and conscious setting into motion. This experience was quite enriching as to understanding the workings of my psyche. It is pleasant, even necessary at a certain point, for me to sink into the unconscious depths, to return to the arms of the mother. But it is necessary, in order to avoid pure madness or else renunciation, to break these chains through action and through a decisive stroke. My current situation, the daily grind I have imposed upon myself, has locked me into an inactive loop of rumination. I now need to find a great quest to set into motion, to live fully.»

Here, it is clear that, at a given moment, introspection led to a danger of a psychological order. Thus, one of the solutions for saving oneself from madness within the framework of artistic creation is the setting into motion of one's being, that is to say, reconnecting with one's body, with matter. This is why we can affirm that the creative process does indeed have an impact on reality, or at least on the artist.

In order to express this phenomenon more clearly, we must return to archetypal elements. The logic of rebirth is essential to a global understanding of the operativity of our system. I will cite Jung once more here:

³³ «But 'great is the danger,' as Mephistopheles says, for the depths are alluring. When the libido leaves the bright upper world, whether from choice, or because the vital forces within have waned, or because human destiny so decrees, it sinks back into its own depths, into the source from which it originally flowed, and returns to the point of origin, the navel, where it first entered the body. This point of origin is called the mother, because it is from her that the stream of life reached us. Whenever some great work is to be accomplished, before which a man recoils, doubtful of his strength, his libido streams back to the fountainhead — and that is the dangerous moment when the issue hangs between annihilation and new life. For if the libido gets stuck in the wonderland of this inner world, then for the upper world man is nothing but a shadow, he is already moribund or at least seriously ill.

³³ Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l'âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, pp. 486-487. English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5.

But if the libido manages to tear itself loose and force its way up again, a miracle is possible: the journey to the underworld was a plunge into the fountain of youth, and the libido, apparently dead, wakes to renewed fruitfulness.»

We thus have the possibility, taking this into account, of a true operativity. An operativity that can express itself in the phases of intensity leading to creativity. Excess is what gives life its rhythm. Extreme slopes to climb, depths in which to let oneself be swept away. Here, I shall return to the notion of sacrifice, which is important within the artistic process. We may have, on the one hand, the nature of a sacrifice made in pure loss, as Bataille might cite, one of consumption tied to notions of luxury. But we shall say, rather, here, that sacrifice is a necessary evil in order to reach a future transcendence. This is certainly rather Christian in the Western sense. But within our logic, there is excess and sacrifice in order to bring an end to the cycle, the Kali Yuga. In sum, there is sacrifice through excess and through the pursuit of intensity.

In this intentional act of sacrifice, there nonetheless lies hidden the hope of rebirth, a swifter, accelerated rebirth. Reincarnation through sacrifice. We thus have a reincarnation through excess. Perhaps there is here an «Icarian» will to burn away in excess what has been built, to destroy through excess, and then to resurrect and transcend being in a new form.

We shall connect here to the logic of the inversion of values and of the inversion of cycles, but this time within a conscious logic. Here, there is a directed will toward sacrifice, a willed sacrifice, a ritual suicide through excess with the aim of being reborn. Within this will to sacrifice, which is then not suffered but summoned by our own wishes, there is metamorphosis. Defined, in Jung's psychology, in these terms:

³⁴ «But the *δῆμιον* precipitates us and turns us into traitors to the ideal that was once ours, and to our finest convictions; traitors to ourselves as we believe we know ourselves. It is sheer catastrophe, because it is an unwilled sacrifice. But things go differently when the sacrifice is made voluntarily. For then it is no longer collapse, no 'transvaluation of all values,' the destruction of all that was once sacred, but metamorphosis and conservation.»

What we have defined as an accelerated process of the destruction of the soul, and thus as a voluntary sacrifice, we shall define by the term «accelerationism.» Beyond its purely formal consideration in the hyperification of the use of new technologies and postmodern values, accelerationism can be applied directly to the creative process.

As explained earlier, in taking the process as the creation of cosmogonic cycles, it is possible to apply acceleration to these cycles. For example, during the slow decadence of an idea after its acme, it is possible to hasten its fall by hyperbolizing it to the extreme. This,

³⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l'âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 593. English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5. The Greek word transcribed by Arthur Bitsch as *δῆμιον* is reproduced here as *daimon* — the source edition's transcription is uncertain (likely a rendering of *δαίμων*, «*daimōn*»), and its exact form is not otherwise specified in the text; the reading «*daimon*» is retained here to stay faithful to Jung's original formulation.

in order to hasten the end of a creation, an aesthetic, an idea, and to reach as quickly as possible the first phase of acceleration leading to a new creative cosmogony.

By accelerating, for instance through the overproduction of a concept already decadent in the artist's mind, this can activate the appearance of new ideas. Here, we shall have, rather, a notion of Bataille's sacrifice through luxury, through excess. Conversely, it is also possible to purely and simply destroy one's works. We can picture this through the many anecdotes of artists destroying their paintings, as with Soulages, who did so when his work found itself at a dead end. This is, in itself, quite common, and nearly unconscious, for most artists.

We have, through this example of the destruction of works, the materialization in reality of the destruction of a past cycle, and the pursuit of the birth of a new cycle. Thus, we must make use of the cyclical logics of the creative process as eternal movement, but also of the possibilities offered by excess, sacrifice, and intensity, in order to be able to overturn the values of these personal cycles of creation. We have here a true operativity, one that makes it possible to render the artist's process a conscious one. The artist would become aware of the impact that the creation of a cosmogony has upon his being and his psyche, and would thereby be capable of modifying this world through his will.

V. SURMODERNISM

1. The Artist and the Postmodern World

Having spoken of the very quintessence of the artist as archetype, but also and especially as an individual acting upon matter, upon his universe, we shall here turn our attention to his real place in the world. But also to the way in which he can act so as to modify the civilizational air in which he finds himself. To do this, we shall first begin by understanding what postmodernity represents, and the impact of modernity upon the arts, in order to state our present situation.

It is clear now, starting from the artist's relation to technique, that the process of a return to classicism through the learning of classical drawing, painting, or sculpture is henceforth useless. The artist's role is not to be a craftsman and to master a technical know-how. Returning to classical painting or drawing would have no meaning, other than that of reproducing past creations.

Taking into account the faculties made possible by new technologies, realism is entirely attainable via 3D modeling or else AI and generative design. Thus, taking up Picasso again, who in his time turned away from figuration with the appearance of photography, we must take this as an example in order to create an art that is fundamentally revolutionary.

Thus, the usual criticisms leveled by people outside the art world at the supposed lack of quality of today's artists in fact betray no understanding whatsoever of the technical upheavals that have fundamentally changed art. These are the very same people who today praise photography as an art, and this to the point of nausea, with the appearance of social media and the camera made available to everyone.

Now, the symbol, the sign in art, and its vocation of insinuating meaning into the object, into the work, has no need whatsoever to take the form of figuration. Simple lines, monolithic volumes possess sufficient representational force to symbolize a concept. Let us take the example of the circle, symbolizing in its simplicity the sun and all the meanings that flow from it. The number of volumes, their shape, their arrangement symbolize something. Let us take three cylindrical pillars without ornamentation: they symbolize the trinity, no need to decorate them, their meaning will be complete whether they are erected on their own or surmounted by a slab. The relation between volumes and light suffices to give a symbolic charge. These questions were already treated by the moderns more than a century ago and must now be considered settled.

Extrapolating from this symbolism, we may say that gestures, interactions are also symbols. This can be seen in ritual logic, where every movement carries a meaning. Let us also take dance as a good illustration of this phenomenon. There remain, however, beyond these questions of the order of representation, questions on the role of the artist, his status, his profession.

The designer, for example, as we were able to say at the very beginning of this work, is in our view an artist, an artist applying his creativity to mediums other than the classical mediums. I would add here that the bad designer would be a designer who is not an artist. Thus, a good designer is an artist; the bad one is not. The designer, far from being an engineer, uses creation as a means of transcendence. Through creation, he transcends a project; creation is of a transcendental nature.

As we have seen, in creating something, we draw closer to the creator gods and thus transmute ourselves into the archetype of the artist. Le Corbusier, taking up the modernists, did not for his part see in the «design» of furniture, for example, any creative vocation whatsoever:

³⁵ «The standard of furniture is in full process of experimentation among manufacturers of office furniture, of trunks, among watchmakers, etc. One need only continue along this path: an engineer's task. And all the nonsense uttered around the unique object, the art-piece of furniture, rings false and betrays a regrettable misunderstanding of the necessities of the present hour: a chair is not in the least a work of art; a chair has no soul; it is a tool for sitting.

Art, in a country of high culture, finds its means of expression in the true work of art, concentrated and stripped of all utilitarian end: the painting, the book, the music.»

Here, we have a view in total contradiction with the discourse we hold on the applied arts. And in itself, presented as Le Corbusier presents it, we would find it hard to prove him wrong. Now, there is here a great question as to the difference between the engineer and the architect. Are the architect and the designer artists or engineers? It is precisely creative capacity that distinguishes the designer, the architect included, from the engineer. In the age of artificial intelligence, this is the only valid argument for the survival of the arts. Thus, we shall repeat ourselves, but in our postmodern world, the designer, the architect, the filmmaker, and their like, are artists applying their art to a medium.

This «status» of the artist is, however, not the heart of the present problems. From a technical point of view, the most significant evolution of art is the use of the machine as a tool of production for creation. Through these new means of production, the artist can surpass what was previously impossible. Thus, the intelligent machine must be used as an assistant to the artist's work. What difference is there between the human assistant and the machine assistant? Both are slaves to the artist's will. Only their capacity to render the idea and the will of the artist matters. We must therefore silence the faint of spirit and the cowards so as to make full use of the machine, and this to our advantage. We might say that the use of these tools would weaken us as creators, would diminish our capacities for want of exer-

³⁵ Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, Paris, Champs Flammarion, pp. 15-16 (architecture brute = spiritualisée / raw architecture = spiritualized). English: *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (1927).

cising them. But this is proof of a great lack of faith in our own capacities as a creative species, and the timid may well go on creating what has always been created, remaining mere mimics and thus at the level of the machine — let us tame the machine!

In this vision of a global Western modernism of progress through technology, modernity was able to create a new classicism. Today, however, we would find it hard to perceive a movement so unifying. Of course, the appearance of the digital and of creation by robot and artificial intelligence is now well entrenched, but should not have the pretensions of an artistic movement. These elements, being mere tools of production, cannot on their own define a movement.

Henceforth, in this nuclearized, atomized postmodern world, the sole certainty is the primacy of the individual, and thus the necessity of becoming aware of it through sacred individualism. On the understanding of art and its purpose, we may, as Gombrich has already done, relativize the aesthetic values of each epoch and civilization. For example, the works of the Middle Ages, which some may describe as inferior to those of the Renaissance, in fact do not share the same purpose. The aim of these works — stained glass, sculptures, and bas-reliefs of the Middle Ages — was to be as comprehensible as possible to the public of the faithful, hence the simplicity of the drawing. Likewise, the Renaissance postulated a perfection of form drawn from Antiquity.

Today, nevertheless, as we have already defined, the purely individual character of our society is reflected in the multiplicity of works offered by artists. Beyond mere trends, I think that we shall be able to see, in the future, once we have sufficient hindsight, the incredible diversity of artistic practices. Some will say that globalization has erased cultural differences, but I think, especially for the West, that we have definitively entered the age of the individual.

The avant-garde had a decisive effect on art. This, through its total scope, encompassing questions ranging from the purely aesthetic to the metaphysical. Today, it is our duty, as artists, to recreate multiple avant-gardes. We must act in revolution and destroy modern classicism.

Art is above all the fruit of its context, the expression of a space/time: religious during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, symbolist during Romanticism, and absolutely scientific and modern today. It is the fruit of its context, but it can also be an agent of change. One might then ask which changes a paradigm first, art or the other active forces of an era. This would amount to asking the question of the chicken and the egg. However, I make the postulate that creation is indeed a vector and a channel of change.

2. Accelerationism

The concept of accelerationism, which we have already been able to see in its notion of transformation for the artist and his work, is central to opening up the perspectives of change for our time. This concept can thus be formalized within a more global vision of artistic movements. We shall here develop this concept within this framework in order to open our vision of the artist in a changing world.

We may also speak here of hyperism, or the nature of our era, turned toward a continuous and exponential acceleration of values and technique. Here, once again, it is a matter of intensity. Thus, this concept is meant to tear down references in order to reimagine the notion of creation and to apply it, to impose it, upon our era. It is also meant to maximize, to the point of excess, the components of the postmodern world.

The question of the machine, as a tool and as an aesthetic form in its own right, is predominant here. Indeed, our digital age has known the same upheavals that our forebears of the modern age were able to know. This violent technological and paradigmatic change has seen the sciences and technique evolve exponentially.

We may turn, to draw a parallel, to Italian Futurism and its total acceptance of technique, through speed, as an aesthetic foundation. Accelerationism, already defined today, has not failed to be compared to this artistic movement of the early twentieth century.

We shall here read the principles of Marinetti's manifesto, which will help us understand the vital force of the movement:

³⁶ «1. We want to sing about the love of danger, about the use of energy and recklessness as common, daily practice.

2. Courage, boldness, and rebellion will be essential elements in our poetry.

3. Up to now, literature has extolled a contemplative stillness, rapture, and reverie. We intend to glorify aggressive action, a restive wakefulness, life at the double, the slap and the punching fist.

4. We believe that this wonderful world has been further enriched by a new beauty, the beauty of speed. A racing car, its bonnet decked out with exhaust pipes like serpents with galvanic breath... a roaring motorcar, which seems to race on like machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samothrace.

5. We wish to sing the praises of the man behind the steering wheel, whose sleek shaft traverses the Earth, which itself is hurtling at breakneck speed along the racetrack of its orbit.

³⁶ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, *Manifeste du futurisme*, published in *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909. English translation from F. T. Marinetti: *Critical Writings*, trans. Doug Thompson, ed. Günter Berghaus (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006).

6. The poet will have to do all in his power, passionately, flamboyantly, and with generosity of spirit, to increase the delirious fervor of the primordial elements.
7. There is no longer any beauty except the struggle. Any work of art that lacks a sense of aggression can never be a masterpiece. Poetry must be thought of as a violent assault upon the forces of the unknown with the intention of making them prostrate themselves at the feet of mankind.
8. We stand upon the furthest promontory of the ages!... Why should we be looking back over our shoulders, if what we desire is to smash down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We are already living in the realms of the Absolute, for we have already created infinite, omnipresent speed.
9. We wish to glorify war — the sole cleanser of the world — militarism, patriotism, the destructive act of the libertarian, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for women.
10. We wish to destroy museums, libraries, academies of any sort, and fight against moralism, feminism, and every kind of materialistic, self-serving cowardice.
11. We shall sing of the great multitudes who are roused up by work, by pleasure, or by rebellion; of the many-hued, many-voiced tides of revolution in our modern capitals; of the pulsating, nightly ardor of arsenals and shipyards, ablaze with their violent electric moons; of railway stations, voraciously devouring smoke-belching serpents; of workshops hanging from the clouds by their twisted threads of smoke; of bridges which, like giant gymnasts, bestride the rivers, flashing in the sunlight like gleaming knives; of intrepid steamships that sniff out the horizon; of broad-breasted locomotives, champing on their wheels like enormous steel horses, bridled with pipes; and of the lissome flight of the airplane, whose propeller flutters like a flag in the wind, seeming to applaud, like a crowd excited.»

As we can see, Italian Futurism could be connected to our definition of accelerationism, so similar are the notions of temporality and intensity. Given the repetition of cycles, it seems logical, then, that this kind of aesthetic movement should reappear. Today, it would be worthwhile to better consider the accelerationist movement of the postmodern era in order to create new forms hitherto impossible and unimaginable. This movement, in the image of Futurism, carries within it the adoration of technology, the intelligent machine as vector of chaos and thus of beauty.

This movement being wholly radical and iconoclastic, the adoration of the past and its rebirth cannot be in keeping with it. The Futurists themselves violently rejected the institutions of their present and the forms of the past, which allowed them to create forms hitherto unknown. Accelerationism, however, in a cyclical and more metaphysical vision, has as its objective to accelerate and provoke the fall of the postmodern world by using its own tools against it, in order to bring about the advent of a new cycle and a new golden age. Thus, in bringing the Kali Yuga to the fore and accelerating it through its divinization by art, the final objective is the advent of a new civilizational cycle. This movement is thus fundamentally revolutionary.

The term revolution refers directly to the cyclical logic of Marx, or again to that of Guénon, and thus to the vision of the world's course as cycles of growth, golden age, decadence, and fall. Thus, in seeking to directly influence the world's course by accelerating it, the accele-

rationist artist stands as a true creator, having an impact on the evolution of his civilization.

We may say that many artists are already accelerationists without knowing it. These would rather be the decadentist accelerationists who, through the decadent influence of our civilization and through an unconscious mechanism, themselves take part in the Kali Yuga. The difference with the conscious accelerationist artist would be that he produces knowingly, and thus deliberately, in order to hasten the fall. He is fully conscious of his aesthetic and metaphysical impact upon the real.

Accelerationism, in its intrinsic will to reduce present-day society to nothing, also holds within it the will for a regenerated future. Thus, we may ask whether the accelerationist work, which in its form tends toward the hyperification of all norms of value, may serve as a syncretism between an exacerbated postmodernity and a primordial tradition.

However, this argument can easily be demolished, for the objective would not necessarily be to recreate the past, but rather to destroy all existing boundaries in order to reach a new paradigm for humanity. It is indeed presumptuous to wish to recreate the past. To recreate the past is merely to perform an act of copying, and thus to produce a facsimile. It is better to consider what has been said above as a preservation of the gregarious instincts of the species *Homo sapiens*, and thus, in anticipating the renewal of the cycle that will be completed by accelerationism, as a new civilizational offering. Thus, we shall not recreate Greek art, classical art, medieval art, or modern art: we are creating accelerationist art, which will be the new aesthetic order for the centuries to come. We shall close the cycle and take it up again exponentially, thanks to the aesthetic discoveries we shall have made during this period of chaos.

The concept of accelerationism is already, at present, well developed, and we may borrow its trivial designations. Though these are not fixed, there would be, among others, two kinds of accelerationism that may interest us here:

Either an exponential accelerationism, which would be the exponential march toward progress and thus, in a non-cyclical vision, that is to say, without collapse.

Defined as: e-acc



Or else a cyclical accelerationism, which would be an apocalyptic vision of the reversal of a cycle through acceleration and collapse.

Defined as: c-acc



In both cases, it is necessary, as an accelerationist, to forget the finality of the process of acceleration. Thus, like the blind, we shall walk straight into this acceleration, being wholly absorbed by it and thus fully engaged. It is only by raising acceleration to the rank of founding principle and end in itself that we shall achieve this change of paradigm.

The accelerationist says:

«We must destroy the thoughts and philosophies of modern decadence, those that prevent us from reaching a new stage of consciousness as a species and a new planetary paradigm. We shall spread ourselves among the stars through technology, we shall attain immortality — let us give thanks for it. We stand at a point of junction between two humanities: the decadent humanity of mere modernity, heir to slave morality, to resentment and to Christian weakness, and that of transhumanity — of super-humanity.»

However, and this is important in order to understand what follows: taking acceleration as an end in itself would not, to my mind, be what could deeply alter the artist's relation to postmodernity. The question of transcendence and of cycles, such as we have defined them under cosmogony, holds a far more totalizing dimension. We shall say that, although useful as a vector of change, accelerationism is not, in the end, the vector of a new artistic paradigm; it is a tool for accelerating processes. In the image of Jung's collective unconscious, it is impossible for us to destroy the archetypes buried within us; thus, the logic of an accelerationism as movement or new artistic order is doomed to failure.

3. Syncretism

We may thus ask ourselves what form this new paradigm might take. Here, we sense, rather than a reactionary rebirth of aesthetic forms or their boundless acceleration, a syncretism totalizing the underlying movements of our era, of the past, and of the future. A syncretism of exacerbated postmodernity and of tradition in its Guénonian sense. We must therefore structure these aesthetic considerations. At times they tend toward the beauty of the past and are rebirths of formal fragments; at times they wish to be violently modern, even postmodern. I think a synthesis is possible, a syncretism of tradition and postmodernity.

We would thus have here an envelope for the work through technique, the body, postmodern, and a concept, a soul, traditional. There would be an exoteric and an esoteric logic.

The term «postmodern» is doubtless inadequate, for it is already worn out and represents an architectural style, with Ricardo Bofill, for example, who himself brought classicism back to life in architecture. Yet postmodernity, as a social phenomenon, holds an altogether different meaning: a phenomenon of the evolution of modern society toward that of postmodernity, which is our own today. Now, as we know, postmodernity is simply what comes after modernity, nothing more. Thus, we must seek a new term for our civilization, our civilization of technological acceleration and of the atomization of societies toward the individual as a self-standing entity.

In the end, the concept and the artistic movement that I sense are already implicit in my own productions and in those of the artists of our era. We must decipher them formally and in their process in order to discover what the collective unconscious wishes to tell us. We might ask ourselves whether, in this world of the nuclearization of practices and principles, we should not return to an age of artistic movements, recreate these politico-artistic factions, and reach consensus toward a renewal of Western civilization based on modernism and antique and metaphysical tradition. Certainly not: the movement of our world is not that of the old artistic or political communities. Art must not be political; it is beyond that.

Let us take, to develop our thought, some of the structuring and persistent elements of our world. We have said that the artist, as an individual, is at the root of present and future change. Thus, the artist of today must be individuated to the utmost extreme: he must create his own personal avant-garde, the artist must be dynamite. This principle of individuation is, on the one hand, at the heart of our present society, but also at the heart of the being-artist. We must embrace this reality.

On the other hand, we of course have the technological reality. Let us take, for example, generative art. This is today one of the fundamental avenues of research of our time. We might, in a syncretic logic, start from the archetypal forms of architecture and modify them via automatic generation. In so doing, tradition is no longer visible, but buried within the work. It is possible to use machines, artificial intelligences, in order to modify, to make tradition mutate and pass into another stage, a transcendence through the machine.

Let us turn, moreover, to architecture. The erection of a cathedral is the finest example of the poetry and romanticism of man. This gesture, a priori beyond all utilitarianism, is nonetheless the image of the creation and founding of the most sumptuous edifices of old Europe. We must break free of cold utilitarianism and be able to recreate this kind of work at a pure loss, beyond functionalism: an art for art's sake, an art of transcendence. In the same sense, one may note the spiritual coherence of modernism with respect to the simple volumes of the temples of the ancient world. Raw architecture is spiritual in its essence; the architectural monolith holds within it a metaphysics.

Returning to Le Corbusier:

³⁷ «Architecture has graver ends; capable of the sublime, it impresses the most brutal instincts by its objectivity; it calls into play the highest faculties by its very abstraction. Architectural abstraction has this about it which is magnificently peculiar to itself, that while it is rooted in hard fact it spiritualizes it, because the naked fact is nothing more than the materialization of a possible idea. The naked fact is a medium for ideas only by reason of the 'order' that is applied to it. The emotions that architecture arouses spring from physical conditions which are inevitable, irrefutable and to-day forgotten.

Mass and surface are the elements by which architecture manifests itself. Mass and surface are determined by the plan. The plan is the generator. So much the worse for those who lack imagination!»

Thus, we are entitled to affirm that art, beyond all rational consideration, holds within it a purely metaphysical and spiritual nature. Even the modernists, who spoke of the proportions of volumes, found in them a sacrality of geometric rules and of mathematical harmony. It is true that, for the postmodern world, there has been a real loss of spiritual consideration. Now, the machine is a cold monster directing our slightest thoughts, our slightest ways of doing things. Our world is governed by this machine, and the cost of this functionalism is the loss of the soul to its benefit. I think we must breathe a soul into this machine, not destroy it, but animate it.

This is why I speak of a syncretism, a counter-intuitive amalgam that must give birth to a new system for understanding the world of creation. Let us take individuated man, let us make him converse with the cold machine, let us let this artist-individual animate the machine, give it a name. Let us restore to modernity a metaphysics of the sacred individual.

4. Surmodernism

Before developing the necessity of a surpassing of postmodernity, it is important to question once again the character of modernity. Is it an epoch, a current of thought, a technological evolution? It is all of this at once. Some will say that modernity began with the appearance of the steam engine, others with the French Revolution, or further back still, during the Renaissance. In truth, modernity is rather the modification of man over the course of recent centuries.

³⁷ Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture*, Paris, Champs Flammarion, pp. 15-16 (architecture brute = spiritualisée / raw architecture = spiritualized). English: *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (1927).

The modernist movement attempted to account for this with cubism, or again with its machines for living in. Modernity has at all times been a source of criticism, at times murderous of traditions, or again a machine for grinding down the proletariat. Now, I affirm that, without modernity, men would have remained in a state of illiterate savagery. Would the appearance of the printing press, for example, not be the beginning of modernity in the diffusion of knowledge? Modernity, unfortunately, is not sufficient unto itself; it is, more than anything else, a machine, a tool at the service of human beings. I think, then, that it is now necessary, with the death of God brought about by modernity, to surpass and go beyond modernity.

The concept of surmodernism came to me one evening, shortly before sleep, during a phase of meditation. This discovery has become one of the centers of my thought and now guides my artistic research. The concept of supermodernity is not new and has already been used to define our societies by the anthropologist Marc Augé. He defines, by this term, a modernity in excess. Surmodernism and the surmodernity it entails are different in our own definition. It is indeed in excess, but it holds within it a fundamental metaphysical dimension. Below are the raw notes written as this idea appeared:

«Notes from the night of 15/01/2025:

Surmodernism: = transcendence of modernity, and does not simply precede it (postmodernity)

Cf. surrealism, transcendence of reality

Surmodernism can transcend modernity through the use of traditional symbols located within the collective unconscious (Jung)

Surmodernism is not simply the acceleration or amplification of modernity through technique and technology; it is also the transcendence of modernity through a metaphysics (Cf. Altar).

What I define as surmodernism is the avant-garde movement of the twenty-first century. It is surmodern in form and in concept. We use new technologies as vectors of meaning: man is at the center of this movement.

Through his creative thought he directs the machine. His vocation is the transcendence of modern man through creation. I speak of transcendence, because we wish to surpass utilitarian modernism and transpose it to the metaphysical, metapolitical sphere.

The machine is used as a tool for representing man's inspiration.

Surmodern man and the surmodernist artist are the new overmen, called to surpass mo-

dern man through action and movement.

Surmodernism = breathing a soul into modernity

There is syncretism between modernity at the formal level and tradition at the metapsychological level.

Surmodernity -> surpass modernity! -> sopravvivere.

It is the act of survival of our Western civilization. Here modernity and technological progress are understood as essential factors of our civilization. From a metaphysical point of view, we situate ourselves at the level of the Nietzschean overman. Thus traditional and aristocratic.

-> A movement of revolution seeking to impose the domination of a surmodern and aristocratic elite to replace the decadent modern bourgeois elite. Here we are not reactionaries, for we wish to surpass modernity. Our gaze turns toward the future.

We are not postmodern; our will is not simply to precede modernity, but truly to surpass it. We are surmodern!

We shall surpass modernity by breathing into it a soul, a metaphysics, a cosmogony, a mythology for the millennia to come. The awakening of the West begins here.

Surmodernism is a movement for the second millennium.»

Thus, following this flash of insight, I was able to glimpse the idea of a new movement for art, for our civilization. Given the definition of modernism and its functionalism, it seems clear to me that the idea of a surmodernism come to surpass mere function is consistent with our era. Thus, this idea appeared to me as a civilizational paradigm and the creation of a new dogma, grounded in modernity, but breathing into it a soul carrying the traditions buried within each of us. Surmodernity is thus the surpassing of modernity and the advent of a new age. When I speak of surmodernity, it is not simply its technological acceleration, but truly its transmutation into a metaphysical movement, a salutary syncretism meant to drive, by extension, the individual to surpass himself.

Here, the prefix sur- of surmodernity is understood as that of sur-vivre, to survive. Taking the Italian *sopravvivere* and the Latin *supervivere*, we have here the fact of being above. As with sur-vivre, etymologically, we have the idea of «living above» modernity.

Thus, for surmodernity as we understand it, there is not only the fact of a modernity in excess, but truly a will to transcend modernity — to be above modernity. This is not a matter of a quantitative order, but truly a qualitative one. Surmodernism is then understood as a transcendence of modernity, unlike postmodernity, which is merely the soulless continua-

tion of modernism.

Surmodernism thus proceeds from modernity. Man has now buried tradition, he has killed God. Man has thus become modern, but, in so doing, this modern man has lost his meaning. This modernity allowed for the destruction of past morality without, however, replacing it metaphysically. Modernity had a mechanical effect, crushing man, while at the same time allowing him to glimpse a certain evolution through technique. Surmodernism, far from being a mere accelerated progressivism of modernity, is rather the will to create a new metaphysics that would come to augment and transcend modernity. Here, there is no return, but a forward momentum, a positive movement, creating a new civilizational paradigm, all while embracing the discoveries of modernity. This new metaphysics will draw from the very source of tradition, from the nuclear heart of our collective unconscious, so as to endow postmodern man with a philosophy of the will to power and of the act of creation as an act of faith.

Surmodernism thus tends toward a syncretism of beliefs in its modern and hence multicultural nature. As Jung was able to affirm, the collective unconscious, and thus the archetypes and myths that flow from it, often share the same attributes from one civilization to another. Thus, we shall speak of a West that has extended across the world, a global movement of creation. I would add here that, in itself, postmodernity and its extreme individuation are henceforth the sole vector of spirituality. To my mind, we must fight for a world-West, through the individuation of each person. We may here cite Jung once again:

³⁸ «The world had not only lost its divine character; it had also lost its soul. In transposing the center of interest of the inner world to the outer world, knowledge of nature has grown infinitely in comparison with what it once was; but knowledge and experience of the inner world have diminished in proportion.»

The ancestral traditions found within our collective unconscious are accessible through individuation. We can see them, feel them. Surmodernism means to be a movement to lift this civilization out of the torpor and immobility, or worse, out of the nihilism in which it finds itself. At present, any will to surpass is seen as something dangerous, and thus to be avoided. Let us take, for example, political ecology, or again its deviations such as animalism, veganism, and all these anti-human movements. Any evocation of a will to power is seen by these post-Christian iconoclasts as a crime committed against the weak, against other species, against the planet, in short, against the entire universe. On the contrary, one ought to efface oneself entirely, to renounce one's ego. These people, a great many of our contemporaries, are engaged in a suicidal course.

What surmodernism proposes is, on the contrary, a movement of life. An *élan vital*. To fi-

³⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, *Métamorphose de l'âme et ses symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, p. 154 (avec l'apparition de la science / with the appearance of science). English: *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, *Collected Works* vol. 5.

nally bring Western civilization back into harmony with confidence in the future. Nothing is lost, and this is notably thanks to this much-decried modernity. It remains the movement that has most lastingly impacted the world. Through modernity, the world became Westernized. It is thus a matter of starting from modernity as the new foundation of our civilization. Surmodernism must therefore have a philosophical character of transcendence of the self, but also an operative character of surpassing through the use of the machine as tool. This movement is viscerally turned toward the future. Surmodernism, beyond a mere glorification of modernity, is indeed the surpassing of it, this through the breathing-in of a metaphysical soul by the individual and by the tradition buried within the collective unconscious.

From an aesthetic point of view, surmodernism entirely embraces the use of all mediums as creative practice, as defined previously. It likewise embraces all technological tools present and to come, whether digital, generative, automated, robotized, and so on. As for digital or virtual art, for example, this virtual and ethereal world is not without recalling the paintings of the Surrealist painters. Surmodernism is intimately bound to Surrealism from an aesthetic point of view, but also a conceptual one, in its transcendental aspect of the discovery of a new metaphysical and parapsychological realm. In the image of Breton, Dalí, Ernst, Magritte, or Miró, who managed to mystify their movement through their psyche and the study of the unconscious.

It may also be of interest to speak, from a surmodern perspective, of technological symbolism or technical symbolism. Figurative symbolism, or again the Romantic symbolism of the nineteenth century, having already been explored, we start from modernity in order to draw out the symbols of modern, abstract, technical forms. Symbolism, being of a spiritual nature and touching upon the collective unconscious, seems to me pertinent here.

Modernity has done its work of destruction, as unfortunate as it was redemptive, upon former beliefs. We may now turn toward a spiritual and symbolic syncretism meant to represent the culture and beliefs of the past, but integrated within the new technical, technological, modern, surmodern forms of our societies.

What is buried at the heart of our unconscious resurfaces as signs expressed through contemporary forms. Thus, the use of new technologies as vectors of symbol is at the heart of this approach, an approach that also draws upon the sciences of psychoanalysis, but at the scale of a civilization. What is buried does not disappear: it resurfaces in other forms. Surmodernism is above all a total acquiescence to boundless creation and to the emancipation of the artist as creative individual. No medium is forbidden, no technique is proscribed, only creation matters.

We understand, then, that the object of this book has more to do with the discovery of a new artistic paradigm than with a simple manual of becoming an artist. On the contrary, here, we shall use the «technical» knowledge of the psychology of the artist as a tool to tend toward a new age of creation, that of surmodernity. Thus, we place the artist at the center of this new cosmology.

5. The Total Artist

Where, then, does the avant-garde stand today? Certainly not in France, at least not at the academic and subsidized level. Here reign mediocrity, cliquishness, ideology. Worst of all is the politicization of these «engaged» artists. They fail to realize that their art, their works, without the subsidies of the very State they execrate, could never see the light of day. These artists possess a self-assurance bordering on the ridiculous. They fail to realize that they are recreating what has already been done fifty, or even a century, before. In itself, the politicization of art is a problem; indeed, as developed above, politicizing art merely reduces it to the level of its era. A politicized work has no horizon beyond the present or the immediate future. Such works will never have the representational force of a Caravaggio, for example. Political facts are indeed epiphenomena in the history of art, but also in History. Art cannot and must not be political. Art cannot be reduced to a phenomenon so closely correlated with the moods of its era. Political art is doomed to disappear with its time. Art, on the contrary, holds a force far more profound and more eternal than political commentary. Thus, I longed to see subsidies disappear, so that artists might discover the true force of art.

Victor Papanek is dead; to the «engaged» designers: stop resurrecting him and let him rest in peace. Geodesic domes and Buckminster Fuller have shown it: they are not the insurmountable horizon of architecture, these latter are burning out. The old world you attempt to bring back to life, like necromancers of bad taste, has finished its work of liberating minds: let these thoughts rest. The avant-garde is seething with generational rage. A flame is smoldering, and it will not be long before it spreads into a vast blaze.

The avant-garde of today is what I would define as surmodern. On the one hand, very much drawn to new means of production in the image of modernism, but also in search of a deeper metaphysical meaning. These are the ones who form the true avant-garde, the true discoverers, the artists who will write the history of art. They are often, without knowing it — at least for now — the true bearers of their era, those who, later, will make it possible to decipher the matrix of the collective unconscious of our time. These artists are beyond academicism: they do not copy, they create.

Returning to the exact location of this avant-garde, there is none. Regionalism in art tends toward the ineffectiveness of works. The total work of art must be universal, or at least civilizational. Le Corbusier was right to speak of the bigotry of regionalist artists. Indeed, in our individualized world, there are no longer groups, movements structured around a leader, in the image of the Surrealists of Paris, for example. The strongholds of art are now scattered across the great world-cities. These strongholds are not centers of creation, but of exhibition. Artists now communicate with one another via digital terminals; there is no

longer any need to be «somewhere» — the world of art is everywhere.

But then, how are we to define the surmodern artist, the artist of the future? Might a return of traditional forms not be the new avant-garde? In the image of the Renaissance? No.

He must be radical, and this in order to impose his vision of the world through his works. He imposes his universe of creation, his cosmology. He is the center of gravity of the world. The surmodern artist must be a total artist. He must not confine himself to a single medium. The work, the great work of an artist, must be seen and heard in its totality, its globality, and in all the interweavings that this entails. As Hegel reminds us in his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*:

³⁹ «He who has only talent can achieve appreciable results only by confining himself to a special branch of art; but, in order to attain perfection within himself, one must be gifted for art in general and feel within oneself the inspiration possessed by genius alone. Talent without genius never goes beyond the limits of a purely external skill.»

Choosing to embrace every sector of creation is an act of resistance against the modern injunction of specialization. Man is not, and never will be, a machine. The machine, however, in its strong capacity for specialization, must be used by the artist, the total creator. It is now clear that art must evolve alongside its contemporary technical means. Whether Marinetti or Benjamin, beyond their political differences, the finding is the same. Today, then, new technologies must be embraced wholeheartedly, whether AI or automated means of production.

It is possible to do this without falling into the trap of the masses, and to preserve the non-reproducibility of things so as to create a scarcity no longer natural, but artificial. Before, one had to choose to reproduce a work. Now, one must choose not to reproduce it, works being henceforth intrinsically reproducible. It is therefore necessary to restore the work of art to the domain of elitism and no longer to that of the masses. To return to the qualitative by refusing the quantitative.

We have also seen this: beyond these considerations on the role of the artist in our time and his place in society, there are deeper things that are vectors of change. Thus, the awareness of the complex cycles of creation, of the inversion of values, of the sacred individual as metaphysical foundations, is essential at the level of the artist's psyche, so as to be able to make work in complete freedom, and this in seeking transcendence through creation. The soul of the artist, of the individual, must tend toward what Nietzsche called the overman. We have also been able to see that the artist, through his own metaphysics, can render his creation and his work operative through the acceleration of the cycles of creation. He is

³⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction à l'esthétique - Le beau*, Paris, Champs, p. 357 (art total = génie / total art = genius). English: *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*

the mage and the shaman. This acceleration may also be understood as a tool for changing paradigm. Thus, starting from the individual, from the very foundations of our postmodern society, it is possible for us, through the figure of the artist, through the creation of artistic cosmogonies, to enter a new aesthetic and civilizational age. The artist is today the center, the focal point of the universe.

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