

Philosopher-Artists, Artist-Philosophers?

A Double Review with Four Footnotes

Peter Mahr

Philosopher-artists: Bruno, Nietzsche, Artaud, Bataille, Klossowski, Lyotard.
Artist-philosophers: Leonardo, Wagner, Duchamp, Beuys, Art & Language, Weibel.

Although aesthetics is commonly defined as the study or characteristic of beautiful works, and its last binding definition – the “aesthetical theory” – was largely oriented towards literature and music, we are now slowly witnessing the emergence of a Western culture whose concept of reality is based on a somewhat contradictory relation with the visual.

By the end of the 1970s, the futility of a systematic-political utopia (the invisible) had become apparent, and led to the division of philosophical thinking into specific political “movements,” and its transformation into a variety of discourses. The French radicalization of economy, ethnology, psychoanalysis, history, and linguistics is clearly based on Nietzsche, with Hegel as its critical point of reference.

The reception of Nietzsche that came from Surrealism (Bataille, Deleuze, Klossowski) finally led to the breakthrough of an artistic, and thus aesthetical, way of philosophizing. At the turn to the 1980s, the fine arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture became the primary disciplines, against the dominance of Concept Art, Performance, and Media Art, not without leaving certain historical-philosophical traces (Oliva, Jencks). The rejection of computerization, informatization, and semiotization that is associated with these developments is analyzed from a socio-theoretical perspective, and the result appears as the philosophical outline of the postmodern *εποχή* (Lyotard).

German Post-Suhrkamp publisher Merve Verlag plays an important role in the publication and discussion of these developments. Two volumes have been published that mark something of a turning point. While *Philosophen-Künstler* (Artist-philosophers)¹ documents a new intellectual consciousness of artists and those interested in art, Jean-Noël Vuarnet’s *Der Künstler-Philosoph* (The Philosopher-Artist),² translated into German after nine years, seems to represent a last flare-up of modern Nietzscheanism, which had been so popular only a few years before.

The title is taken from one of the fragments of Nietzsche’s estate, in which he contemplates an ideal artist that could shape and mold human beings, while the self-experiment of *Lebenskunst* (art of living), and the arts in their different substances, would serve him as preliminary exercises. Contrary to this expectation of the future, Vuarnet sees Nietzsche himself as the last of a series of philosopher-artists, which started with Giordano Bruno and continued with Julius Caesar (Lucilio) Vanini, the *Libertins* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Diderot, Rousseau, de Sade, de Laclous and Kierkegaard.

At a closer look, the philosopher-artist thus turns out to be a philosopher-poet, keeping himself aloof from academic traditions, claiming a rather untidy discourse (in the sense that he can not be integrated in the individual disciplines, where philosophy could unfold its purity); his work is eroticism come to life, and finally a life experiment.³

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Gerhard-Johann Lischka (ed.), *Philosophen-Künstler*. Hannes Böhringer, Gerhard-Johann Lischka, Sylvère Lotringer, Bernard Marcadé, Peter Weibel, imd 131, Merve, Berlin 1986

2
Jean-Noël Vuarnet, *Der Künstler-Philosoph*, imd 127, Merve, Berlin 1986

After brilliant summaries of the positions of for instance Bruno and Nietzsche, Vuarnet leaves the reader not quite clear as to why the twentieth century saw only the zero grades of the ontological artist; the false prophet, and the concrete dreamer. Apparently, the stage of history itself on which figures like de Sade or Nietzsche were able to give a visible performance without having to dissolve into doubles, has disappeared. It is superfluous to point out that poetry, the first art form with and after Plato, favors philosopher-poets. The philosopher-artist of the fine arts, however, seems to have much more in common with Leonardo than with Bruno.⁴

3

It is not surprising that the crisis of philosophy towards the end of the nineteenth century was also reflected in the roles of those that practiced it. The professorial chair – tellingly, not the professorial pedestal – had only been an uncontested part of the structure of philosophical institutions at universities, and of their teachings, for a hundred years. This time was in turn preceded by an era stretching from Bacon to Voltaire, during which the *scavants* operated largely on a private level, creating their own public mainly through correspondence, and hardly at all through teaching, until the *philosophes* and their multi-media and multi-artistic activities (Diderot, Rousseau, de Sade) put their philosophical knowledge entirely at the non-doctrinal service of Enlightenment within the framework of their encyclopedic initiative. With the foundation of a modern university in Berlin, and the long-term foundation of initially philosophical and empirical individual disciplines beyond the turn to the twentieth century, the artistic deficit soon became apparent. Artistic: it was philosopher-artist Nietzsche – the thinker not of the chair, but of the stage (Sloterdijk) – who called to mind the *art* of philosophy by picking out his philosophical, scientific, literary, and intellectual role as an individual as a central theme. The art of philosophy itself, of philosophy *sui generis*, re-emerged as modern age progressed. This means that Nietzsche – again, or maybe for the first time – weaved the relative uncertainty of the spheres of all *artes* into his work, the sphere of the trivial philosophy of writing, talking and discussing, and that of the quadrivial philosophy of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music, which had long been extended to include the *artes mechanicae*, including architecture, painting, and sculpture, and the natural sciences as far as biology. Without getting involved in one artistic or scientific sphere, let alone identifying with it, Nietzsche remains an individual, both as a philosopher and an artist. In publishing treatises, aphorisms, autobiographical material, poems, dithyrambs, pamphlets, prologues, and a novel, he seems to easily develop an *artistic* philosophy, an art that has developed out of philosophy or into philosophy, and that fits the theoretical work and wisdom of philosophical thinking as Dia- or Polylogue (Plato), Diapsalma (Kierkegaard), Puzzle (Brentano), Poem (Mallarmé), Manifest (Tzara), Table of Contents (Wittgenstein) or Conceptual Art (Art & Language). From a greater distance, the splintering

of the structure of the philosophical discipline into a multitude of philosopher-artists or artist-philosophers, of whom the philosopher with the hammer was the loudest, also signals a crisis of the philosophies of aesthetics or art. While its invention in the eighteenth century was meant to fill a gap in the philosophical system at university level (Baumgarten) by offering a general theory of the fine arts (Sulzer) or at least of one of their groups, such as the visual arts, a stronger association with the real world of art was unavoidable in the long term, and could only dismantle the theoretical distance to the philosophical theory of art, which still existed in the middle of the nineteenth century (Vischer). In this sense, *philosophy of art nolens volens* becomes a philosophy that, in whatever methodical way, goes with art, belongs with art, for instance by mimetically nestling up to art (Simmel, Rilke). This philosophy thus becomes a question of at least methodical style or taste, as shown in the production of catalogue texts. Theory is meant to be structuralist rather than art-historical, essayistic-experimental rather than scientific, hermeneutical rather than analytical, aesthetical rather than non-aesthetical; that is, dry, technical, formalized. The fact that a philosophy of art of mainly French provenience experienced such an upswing in the 1980s (Baudrillard, Charles, Danto, Deleuze, de Duve, Kofman, Kristeva, Lacoue-Labarthe, Lyotard, Nancy, Serres, Virilio), was also due to the discipline-related reason that the analytical area of research of art philosophy – definitions of art, aesthetical terms, an ontology of aesthetical objects and the classification of the arts – had become artificial. In a sardonic sense, the philosophy of *art* would then be no more than an unnatural philosophy, thus also no longer tied to art itself. Much more than the material that lends itself particularly to art – just like the material that lends itself to poetic assimilation – the artificial material of this specific kind of philosophy of art has, similar to petroleum, secretly changed into something artificial rather than artistically plastic: into an artificially, affectedly forced philosophy, a fake philosophy, even a readymade philosophy. But help is at hand. It is going to come from art, and if not from art itself, from its brother-in-law.

Although Sylvère Lotringer regards in his contribution *Der Philosoph und seine Doubles* (The philosopher and his doubles)¹ Artaud as a continuation of Vuarnet's series, the focus shifts from the thinker-poet to the artistic philosophy-artist. Artaud, an icon in the pubs of Vienna (*mutatis mutandi* Iggy Pop), compensates for the shortcomings of language with an art in which written and theatrical fragments seem to spontaneously constitute life out of a broken physical identity.

As a philosopher of his own inability to philosophize academically, Artaud surrenders to a war of nerves of brain matter. He solidifies his experience in retrogressive "Hegelian"

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There is little adornment in this world, said Stéphane Mallarmé,

dialectics and thus arrives at an illusion of matter. The plague distorts all portrayals, but cannot itself be portrayed, just like the void of philosophy can only be overcome by imagination. Imagination makes the lethal-physical terror visible, the groaning and screaming instead of the audible word, the ritual instead of the theatre, the disgraceful deeds of the flesh instead of sexuality, the ape instead of God.

As shown by Artaud's correspondence with the publisher Rivière, the failure as a poet makes him invent the figure of the poet, but also that of the mentally deranged, possessed man, until he resurrects himself in the doubles of Abaelard, van Gogh,

and Masson. The co-founder of perspective, Uccello, is turned into the saboteur of perspective, the subjectivity of the illusionist stage is fragmented into inlay work.

It is surprising that Lotringer lets his thrilling explanations on Artaud culminate in a notion of the philosopher-artist whose similarity to Hegel's concept of life is tangible.

"Why do philosophers lose their resources when it comes to art and artists?"¹ Bernard Marcadé attempts to answer this question via a reckoning with academic philosophy. Because the illusionism of painting is not a phantasm, but a deception, and thus

writing in the world capital of the nineteenth century in the name of self-confident fashion critic Marguerite de Ponty, but there is a lot of it in Paris (*Bijoux*, in: *La Dernière Mode for August 1, 1874*, September 6, 1874, pp. 2–3). This irony not only refers to the industry of vanity. The city itself – which is, compared to London, a world in itself, an artificially artistic, artistically artificial world – is beautiful! The second compliment goes to those who particularly like to adorn themselves: women. As every nature has a flora, every human hand has a jewelry box. The speech on natural instincts that follows traces the line of thought from Dubos to Taine, and finally arrives at a human (artistic) instinct. As the sun shines on a flower, a woman fills her jewelry with light simply by wearing it – not the other way round, as Mallarmé subtly implies. Is there a more beautiful way of vindicating the criticism of art? Hardly, when we look at the poet's civilization-critical statements: first of all, even if the naive taste of production is also valid, imports are to be rejected; secondly, jewelry that has been brought to light in excavations acquires a model function only and exclusively through the bold usage in a syncretism of style; thirdly, jewelers alone can transfer the gold work of the classic and barbaric ancient world to a "wonderful, quite critical science." Against the setting of an intellectually stimulating Paris as universe, museum, and bazaar, Mallarmé's poetology of jewelry is about the intimate magic of the decorative ornament. As clothes are not designed by the seamstress (*faiseuse*), so should jewelry designs be allographically as if by the architects, who also produced Paris, the world's jewel, out of town houses. Only this art-syntactic aspect makes it possible to refer to jewelry as an art – but only with reference to the most costly natural materials, which "blend in with the world as if by nature." Madame de Ponty thus does not put the stones that are popular with the fashion of the time into the "bridal basket" – the figure of speech she chooses for the jewelry-critical selection for the fall season of 1874 – but rather the necessary words: ear buttons and locket for dinners and dinner parties, the latter studded with sapphires, furthermore bangles, rings, agraffes for scarves, flacons, lace handkerchiefs, the black silk fans which, for Mallarmé, have literary associations, adorned with white ribbons for certain occasions, and showing images of mundane life at the sides, no longer in the middle, then the Indian

cashmere scarf: although it is out of fashion (!), it envelops the jewelry, one pearl after the other, one stone after the other, functioning as a shrine for the naked stones, which we will see "re/counted" both serially and erotically. Valuable lace is also part of the selection: Chantilly lace and application lace from Brussels, not made of velour or silk, and designed by a fashion designer (*couturière*). But Mallarmé has not finished yet. The return from the poetry of objects to the person who works with these objects checks his speculations and leads to a practical question regarding the season's trends. Will the tournure change? Will we continue to see the fitted waists that have been around for some time? Doubts are beginning to stir. Does fashion come from anywhere else than the salons of the exhibitions? Whether painted portraits are going to anticipate fitted waistlines will only become evident at the beginning of September. Laconically, Mallarmé casts a glance into the future through the jewelry line-up, a glance that could give answers to these questions. The distance has something to do with the relation between fashion and accessories. Only a few decades earlier, fashion and jewelry would have been regarded as an independent and derivative art form respectively. Mallarmé's perception of the problem of time turns the relation between the two into a fruitful one. For the readers, the text is dated back to August 1, public delivery is supposed to take place on September 6 – this would make sense, as fall fashions could be an issue at that point in time, even if Mallarmé was to restrict his observations to the shops and their displays and did not visit the workshops that are working on styles for late fall. It is too late for summer fashion, but only if Mallarmé was to accept the temporary and anticipatory character of fashion criticism – and in the end, that is what he does. He wants to win time, a breathing space on principle, not only in order to get beyond the start of the toilette, but also to be able to act beyond its finishing and completion. Jewelry becomes something that will stay, an *υποκειμενον*, something that comes to the mind of fashion during the period of waiting from July to September. The relation between the major and minor matter has thus been reversed to such an extent that jewelry is allocated the space of an independent discourse. It has been made possible to talk about jewelry as something that is independent in its own right.

opposed to the grasping of ideas, Plato envisaged the expulsion of painters from his state. However, during Renaissance at the latest, Platonism destined art for greater things. According to Marcadé, philosophy has yielded to seduction from this point onwards. Art becomes of philosophical interest. However, its inherent deception is revoked by a counter-deception. Hegel's cunningness of reason becomes the cunningness of art, and the abstract idea finds its sensual manifestation. We find it in poetry in its purest form – Hegel thus describes the history of art as a history of dematerialization, starting with architecture and sculpture and arriving at poetry via painting and music. Marcadé

seems to sense that this process also runs through the art of the twentieth century when he battles against Conceptual Art.

Finally, it was Nietzsche who coined the idea of art as a preferred perspective of thinking, Marcadé continues. Contradicting Plato, Nietzsche affirms that art is closest to the nature of things. Art – illusion as illusion – even confronts the philosophical desire to know of the fictitiousness of fiction. To put it even more strongly, only art can grasp the world of deception. While the origins of thinking can be found in lies and confusion, the artistic, pictorial way of thinking is closer to the body and to the world of objects.

5

What was not (yet) visible in its entirety to the outside world in 1979 consisted of several observations, theories, analyses, and statements by Peter Weibel. For Weibel, the shop window is basically a display of goods, which, in a multitude of display cultures, also includes media showcases such as film, literature, theatre, and television. But what we are seeing here is not a display of names and titles, but rather an obstruction consisting of price tags. This means that the signified exhibit is cut short and obscured by the signifier exhibition, thus triggering off a battle of opposites over the signified, which in art history is paralleled in the "Abstract Rebellion" around 1910. What until 1800 existed in correlation to aestheticism as dispositive, epistemologically amounted to ignorance from 1900 onwards. What was going to be confirmed by the art of the 1980s was the primacy of the decorator, who shapes and forms on a formal, material, and – with regards to context, theory, and the power of definition – on an informative level (*Schaufenster-Botschaften. Ein Piktorial zur Ikonographie des Urbanismus*, in: Peter Pakesch (ed.), *Künstlerschaufenster*, Graz 1979, pp. 5–17). What leads from Dürer to Plotter, and makes photography as a technological invention readable as at least "partly inspired by artistic goals," allows Weibel the conclusion of regarding the media *per se* as an extension of the concept of material = (work of) art. To put it differently: media that are regarded as being limited to the technological media of representation and communication of everyday life can only be included in an extended artistic idea of the material, as confirmed by the history of art. The works of the structural Intermedia (such as Mixed Media), which should not be confused with the merely additive Multi Media, thus reveal the theoretical basis of a sociological aesthetics of the media, which dedicates itself to the handling of societal contrasts such as mass medium and art medium, commercialism and avant-garde, trivial culture and advanced culture. For this reason, the objective of media art can now be defined more precisely. It is not merely about technological communication tools "as art," not merely about medium-specific art, but about an art of perception, which takes into account the parallelism of the history of art and perception theory: "The knowledge of art: esse est percipi", this – as we could by now add in the sense of Bourdieu – does not refer to the vain know-

ledge of being seen by others when on television and to thus come into existence (*Die Medienkunst und der veränderte Werkbegriff. Zur allgemeinen Angst vor der Medienkunst in einer von Medien überfluteten Welt*, in: Galerie Krinzinger (ed.), *Zur Definition eines neuen Kunstbegriffs*, Innsbruck: Galerie Krinzinger 1979, pp. 21–24). In any case, art must face up to contrasts – whether it is forced to do so or does so on its own volition. Forced, and yet at the same time immanent – this is how the state persecution of the Vienna Actionists movement is shown in Weibel's analysis: the breaking out of the judicial circuit of healthy popular sentiment and state-decreed conception of order led to art being stigmatized as a disturbance. The state process of identification thus revealed a "state grammar of sentiment:" "Most likely, the police dully sensed that they (Nitsch, Muehl and the others) were striving for a liberated sensuality of feeling, but like the majority of the population, they thought it was all about the artists', when in truth it was all about theirs.)" (*Fall Nummer 5: Wiener Aktionskünstler – 1963–73. Kunst: Störung der öffentlichen Ordnung*, in: *Im Namen des Volkes*, Wilhelm-Lehmbruck-Museum der Stadt Duisburg, May 6 to July 22 1979, pp. 48–65). "alpha rhythms are fluting / tragic melodies / my heart is pumping in notes / the pain that is tearing / exciting my diaphragm / the eye obeying with movement / – only sense, sense is holding still (...) existence is trembling like / a night express / full of noise and light / day and night are changing / the shadow that breaks / the splintering tear / turning me around (...) what i know / is all just music / is all just shadow (...) are my vertebrae / paving stones / on an endless road / i am just a letter / in a small / unknown tincture." (with Loys Egg: *Alpharhythmen*, (1979), on: *Hotel Morphila Orchester*, Bonus Tracks, CD 2, = EX 266-2, Vienna: Extraplatte 1995, No. 6; cf. same artist, *Nietzsche-Rock*, in: *Neues Forum* 26, No. 307/308, July/August 1979, pp. 72–75)

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Space and time in particular serve as points of reference for a way of thinking that, in 1964, was already trying to address the still barely foreseeable changes that were imminent in art. For instance, space developed in the direction of a punctual, tactilely omnipresent global-

The fact that this pictorial way of thinking⁵ can in no way be separated from conceptual-linguistic thinking is demonstrated by Peter Weibel's *Logo-Kunst. Eine künftige Methode der Bildbetrachtung* (Logo-art. A future method of image contemplation).¹

We are talking about semiotic dialectics that derive from the antithetics of Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and the theory of signs. The inherent contradiction of reason (subjective antithetics) and the polarity of the compared objects (objective antithetics) are first introduced as dialectical description logic. But as the ribbon between pictorially represented concepts and being has been

cut – as shown in abstract art from 1910 onwards⁶ – description dissolves into mere signs, and dialectical logic into a method that must take into account the fact that the world is put into language, and the logothetic inversions this entails. From now on, the sign is split into the signified (what is referred to, the “Real”), and the signifier (the designating desires). The signifiers fight over the signifieds in diametrical opposition. The free floating of a signifier is prevented by the binary structure of language. At the same time, the imaginary element of desire and the symbolic element of language are engaged in a continuous undermining of the Real, until the latter has disappeared

ity (McLuhan), as if another Leibnizian order of ubiquitous, coexisting objects was building itself up against Cartesian division, an order where there is nothing dead, chaos only seems to exist, and where strong scents can even penetrate less porous materials (Charpentrat). Specialized spaces or fields receive ontological dignity. It is thus nothing but the logical space of distinguishing and identifying that is driving forward the expansion of the world of art (Danto). For the first time, the language of the novel now provides the space for an experience of thinking that leaves the soul of the surrealists behind on an anti-psychologistic level (Foucault); but also that of a subject that feels relieved, as yet, of the embedding in a medial dispositive: the subject should rather be interested in its own division, as it is witnessed in the inversion of the I-see-myself-way of perceiving, an inversion that already structures the relation of desire to the image, in which the place of a central screen is always marked (Lacan). This goes with a timelessness that can be directed against or run parallel to film and history, and radicalizes the modern *momentum*. Taste, or, more in keeping with the times, creativity, is capable of criticizing the past, and is, in this respect, above time, with imagination coming to the rescue by taking over the function of the moment as a mood (Perrault). Abstract painting also scores a late triumph when it captivates movement as a moment that is perceived as a flickering movement (Gombrich), as in Bridget Riley's Op Art. In 1964, the fact that such a phenomenon could be reflected in media theory was already in the air, if not on an art historical level, at least on a culture historical one. The impression that a painted picture is able to convey – what can generally (!) be said about reality on a visual level – was seen as dependent on the two medial layers of light and paint: on the medium of light, which awakens objects into existence, that is, makes them visible, and swathes and outlines them in an impenetrable transparency; and on the medium of paint spots, which, if arranged in a certain way, can form symbols, and approach reality as mere symbolizations of light. Especially this reduction of the painting process expresses the sphere of visually expressible reality, from which the original symbols of art then rise. This might also be true for the languages of words and music (Broch). The work appears as a limited,

temporary time center of energy that is no longer transcendent; it appears as absorbed by the new entity of the object of art, and thus as frightening, but also as conveying a new freedom (Rosenberg). In 1964, the attempt to re-convey these poetics with a hermeneutics of the work was also the journalistic point of departure for a modern, interdisciplinary enterprise in its own right, the institutionalization of which still remains unparalleled in the German-speaking world (Jauß). The question of how an artist would be thinkable without art (Huelsenbeck) could also be asked in this context, beyond the revolutionary fest with its iconoclasm (Starobinski), and beyond all dangerousness that such a role would entail without the background of Avantgarde. What and who would the artist, the philosopher, be today? The star, the maniac, the genius? Faced with such attributes and legends, such a possible mythos of the artist, the philosopher, would have to be analyzed as a de-politicized statement, as a mythos that empties what is real, and cuts out the historical characteristics of the persons involved. The materials of this mythos could possibly be discovered in an analysis of the language of objects, by confronting the latter with the mythos as a meta-language (Barthes). Roland Barthes, *Mythen des Alltags*, Frankfurt am Main; Hermann Broch, *Hugo von Hofmannsthal und seine Zeit. Eine Studie* (1955), Munich; Pierre Charpentrat, *Barock. Italien und Mitteleuropa*, Munich; Arthur C. Danto, *Die Kunstwelt*, (1964) trans. by Peter Mahr, in: *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, No. 42 (1994); Michel Foucault, *Débat sur le roman dirigé par*, in: *Tel Quel*, No. 17, 1964; Ernst H. Gombrich, *Moment and Movement in Art*, in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 27 (1964); Richard Huelsenbeck (ed.), *Dada. Eine literarische Dokumentation*, Reinbek; Hans Robert Jauß (ed.), *Nachahmung und Illusion*, Kolloquium in Gießen 1963, *Poetik und Hermeneutik 1*, Munich; Jacques Lacan, *Die vier Grundbegriffe der Psychoanalyse, = Das Seminar, Book XI* (1964), Weinheim/Berlin; Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, New York; Charles Perrault, Hans Robert Jauß (eds.), *Parallèles des anciens et des modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences* (1688–97), Munich; Harold Rosenberg, *The anxious object; art today and its audience*, New York; Jean Starobinski, *Die Erfindung der Freiheit 1700–1789*, Geneva.

completely (Lacan). The loss of the world's concreteness thus means that for the concept of art the traditional platonic distinction between illusion and reality no longer applies, and that the picture is understood as the statement of precisely that what the depicted "real" is not showing.

Weibel tells the following story after Pliny: Zeuxis wants to convince Parrhasios of his painting talent. The grapes he has painted seem so real that birds are trying to peck at them – thereupon, Parrhasios paints a curtain that seems so real that Zeuxis tries to open it to see what lies behind it. The conclusion: the image is not showing what it is showing, and at the same time, it is not what it is showing.

Weibel went on to demonstrate the complex artistic logic of this logothetic concept of art⁶ in the form of ideological criticism with the pop group *art of noise*, "Entartete Kunst" (degenerate art), Beuys, Haring/Holzer, Amadeus, and advertisements for mineral water. The questions what kind of art is acceptable for logothetics, and what the aesthetics for a future Logo Art would look like, remain open. Similarly determined by artistic experience are Hannes Böhringer's sketches of a *Künstler philosophentheologe* (artist-philosopher-theologian).¹

Böhringer asks himself the following question: what functions must a studio chair carry out in order for life to pass into art? As a work chair, it allows the alchemic transformation and purification of materials in an expression of inner processes, the aim being the imitation of the creative power of nature. As a comfort chair, it provides balance and contemplation, a passivity without which the active element would run dry. As an office chair, it helps to productively implement the bureaucracy that has invaded its sphere.

According to Böhringer, visual art is currently situated in the cultural park of the post-industrial service society (Bell), which is less about producing and selling works of art than about administrating aesthetical services. As the production of goods is replaced by the production of know-how in networks, the artist is increasingly dependent on contacts and information in order to gain any access at all to the world of art.

The individual administrative institutions – art colleges, galleries, exhibition centers, art fairs, museums – increasingly lose their unambiguous functions, which means that the administration itself is in the process of mutating into a work of art. The administration of the fortune of modern art also leads to its transformation. Böhringer impressively demonstrates the assassination of this transformation with the example of Reinhard Mucha's installation at the Württembergischer Kunstverein in 1985. But as uncertainty is the signature of our times (Gehlen), there is a danger that the openness of art will be fixed in an unambiguous space. Works of art on public buildings, the "staging" of exhibitions, art as the illustration of a theory, all require a continuously "changing exhibition" on a gigantic scale. Accord-

ing to Böhringer, the only way out of this entanglement lies in theoretical uncertainty. It was initially grasped by philosophy and theology as the overflowing, divine life, the tension between what is individual and what can be generalized. In modern times, Böhringer continues, this effort has degenerated into aesthetical contemplation, but has been given a new lease of life by the theoretical reflections of modern-age artists – with Impressionism, Constructivism (dissolution of objects), Dada (universal interpretation), with the work of Kandinsky and Klee (universal symbols). The philosophical heritage is continued by Malevich and Newman with their sublime abstractions, and a socially exclusive style; the Christian theological heritage was taken up by Dada, Fluxus, and Pop Art, which relinquish the concepts of perfection and include the viewer through the montage.

Böhringer emphasizes the latter with regards to a universal capacity to connect, which, however, doesn't allow to regard modern art either as the start of a new epoch, or to impose it with of the verdict of salon art. The first phase of a religiously formulated shaping of the new times, and the second phase of the dogmatic administration of this revolution, is finally followed by postmodern art, characterized by the artistic self-administration of modern art as an ambiguous quantity. The artist must constantly be aware of this paradox, as Böhringer emphasizes. Artistic creativity should thus be undertaken from the work chair, the comfort chair, and the administrative chair, under the guidance of the latter. The transformation of experiences into stenograms, the simulation of the wideness of the world, the regression into the embryo state of the conceptual apparatus, the perception and articulation of a situation, the production of a work and thus the dismantling of the determined idea and the rule of self-administration over production, make it possible to connect with the existing or produced wideness of the world. The philosopher's stone, *le pierre philosophique*, has been found, the problems of composition resolve themselves.