Changing the Past of the Future

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Their history and mine

There are two ways to understand history: as an objective line of less or more, seeming or really, connected events proceeding beyond us and independently of us or, conversely, as subjective intuition, something that the same line of events records in our subconscious. If we could conditionally associate the former with the paradigm of culture connected with the Classical perception of space and form (the Apollonian aspect), then the latter would correspond to the Romantic perception of the world (the Dionysian aspect). It makes no difference whether we speak of the history of an individual or a society; according to naturalists' latest opinions self-awareness is characteristic even of the most primitive forms of life, that is, of the biosphere in the wide sense, not to mention the semiosphere: culture, city, commune, state, conservation acts born as a result of political decisions and of particular importance to national culture, lists of monuments, and the UNESCO World Heritage List. All these are expressions of collective self-awareness, manifestations through which history expresses itself through its visible signs.

It is not easy to answer the question, 'what is history?' Herodotus starts his *The Histories* with the history of ancient Babylon, Egypt, Lydia and other countries and arrives at his main aim, setting the East, which belongs to the past, in contrast to Greece, which was born under the star of the future, that is, of the West. Antique civilisation could achieve self-realisation as a cultural integrity only after it had constructed a seemingly integral barbarian world of which the structures situated beyond a semiotic borderline are declared to be non-structures (Lotman 1999: 17). The people favoured by the Olympian Gods built a new Temple of Athena, the Parthenon, thus laying the basis for a new tradition and a new canon. For the time being, as *pater historiae* tells us, the plan was to leave

the temples of the Acropolis in ruins in memory of the great victory. Creativity and conservatism, revolution and restoration, that is, two inseparable parts of one and the same process, form a whole, and the future is constructed as an inversely proportional reflection of the past.

As a result, the aim of the annals of Herodotus is not to tell us of everything that has once been, but to construct his own narrative – *apodexis* – of selected fragments of history, separating grain from chaff, good from bad, our victories from others' defeats. History, wherever and by whomever it was written, has been written in the name of the beautiful and the strong. History is not just any kind of story, but a story laid down according to one concrete method, a science that needed evidence to prove its points, as though from then on the evidence needed someone to explain its idea and meaning. A monument that has no voice is not remembered, because it has no story to tell. The grave of a simple man is only the grave of a simple man, the grave of somebody who was buried 'in times immemorial', but there is no one who remembers him today. Only fame – *kleos* (from the word *klyen* – to 'hear') – is what gives the past the right to speak.

History as hate and history as love

St. Augustine's idea that God created not just our world but also our time out of nothing is one of the postulates of civilisation that is difficult to fully accept. Even He who established the notion of time apparently didn't have absolute clarity about it. St. Augustine writes: 'What … is time? As long as no one asks me, I know; but if someone asks me and I try to explain, I do not know.' (*Confessiones*, 11.14.17.) Within us, history lives on two different levels. On the one hand, it lives as God's time, something that passes not as an incessant chain of births and deaths from the creation of the world to the Last Judgement, and on the other hand as an immediate chain of our own births and deaths. Choosing the method of history we can choose between transcendental absence and immanent presence. The former leads us outside ourselves, to history written in the name of something or somebody. To write such a history we have to construct an opponent, somebody whom we need standing in a battlefield or in a rostrum. The other history exists within us; it is our own to the end, equally carrying ambitions of the *super-ego* and the bitterness of loss peculiar to *alter ego*.

The history we have always known is dedicated to heroes of the Trojan War and written down in hexameters. The wanderings of Odysseus led the king back

home, where unfortunately, as we know, his first act was mass murder caused by jealousy. Upper layer history carries in itself not so much the seal of love as of hatred; as Marc Bloch puts it, it is written with the hand of the Great Miller, not of a maker of musical instruments, both [of whom] work with the precision of a millimetre, but the miller uses mechanical precision instruments, while the maker of musical instruments is mainly guided by the sensitivity of his own ear and fingers (Bloch 1983: 19).

The history at the beginning of which stand narratives in the spirit of Homer's epics brings to us a chain of events through which history speaks to us as an established tradition and line of facts always taking the side of one or another person or thing. History as free creation, poetry described by Gaston Bachelard (1998: 17) in his course on the poetics of space, has no room in the mainstream of 20th century philosophy, the framework of structural approach. Existentialist fear and worry, and notions such as solitude, yearning and love do not fit the framework of a traditional piece of historical writing. At least in our conscious activity, we are guided by history as something to which it is characteristic to express emotions not peculiar to the individual, but wider and therefore more elevated. History is the assignments that we have given it. It guards over the events like a watchdog even when we are not at home.

Like all philosophy that started with the Renaissance, history is led by conviction about the possibility of rational interpretation of the surrounding world. In the discussion between analytical and phenomenological methods, the trend treating events as a causal and logical string, the tradition established in the name of the victorious generation, is still prevalent. To achieve cognisance of ourselves, we need someone to be different from us in some significant aspect. We need Persians like Persians need us. To consolidate our positions, we need history as we need its visible documents – monuments of the past. As Alois Riegl has written, monuments have cultural meaning, they exist in order to prove the need of our existence to the next generations (Riegl 1982: 21ff).

The history ringing on the ground of national sagas, and discursive treatment intended for the recording of those sagas, as well as conservation and the monuments constituting its documentary proof, bring to us one part of what has been – the part handed over as tradition from father to son in the teachings of the Torah, while it discards another part, living experience and sensations we receive in a non-existent moment between the present and the future: that is, the only

existing reality, according to St. Augustine, the present. This is because history has not been recorded from the past to the present, as might be presumed, but the other way round, to the past from the present. Side by side with a history that is independent of my intrinsic ego exists my own history, which belongs to me alone and is therefore based on experience. In the case of such a treatment of history, facts do not follow each other like white milestones along a motorway leading into the future, but are topsy-turvy, in a disorganised, scattered fashion, like patches of paint in a painting classified as Abstract Expressionism.

The world is not what I think but what I experience, is the central idea of the phenomenological approach; the magical 'I' is the part of 'we', inner world of that we call outer world. Or as Maurice Merleau-Ponty has put it: 'The world is not an object such that I have in my possession the law of its making; it is the natural setting of, and field for, all my thoughts and all my explicit perceptions.' (Merleau-Ponty 2004: 67.) Nothing replaces that miraculous moment that makes us intrinsically shudder and delve into dreams forgotten in our subconscious through our intrinsic intuition. Proceeding from *cogitatio*, study of matter and the perceivable world, a person thus arrives at *meditatio*, which is introspective return to oneself, until he finally comes into contact with the depth of the intuition of truth, *contemplatio*. Side by side with the acquired convention, there is also a very individual history, where victories may be defeats, where the scale of values is not defined so much by the *Sonderweg* of European thinking ever since Chlodovech but by history laden with images of thought inseparable from the subject – thousands of memories, emotions and lines of poetry.

That is a part of the world which I have experienced truly and personally, something that I agree with and that is reborn over and over again in my consciousness, something that has stuck to us like a leaf from the twigs Finno-Ugrians beat themselves with in their smoke saunas. The measure of such a treatment of history is not a relay race round and round a stadium, but only the passing of the baton between the past and the future within one brief moment, something that raises the feet from the ground and above its field of gravitation for a fleeting instant, permitting the predominance of Aristotle's idea the historian and the poet differ from each other not because one of them writes verse and the the other one prose, for also 'Herodotus could be put into verse, but it would still remain history, whether in verse or prose), but because historian relates what happened, the poet what might happen. That is why poetry is more akin to philosophy and

is a better thing than history; poetry deals with general truths, history with specific events.' (*Poetics,* 1451b.)

History as religion and conservation as its church

The word existed before everything else – a spirit that hovered above the waters. Emptiness is at the beginning and end of everything that exists, as both Lao Tse and Norbert Wiener teach us. The German *Raum* and the Swedish *rum* simultaneously mean the cosmos and a space that is defined, limited, and taken into possession by man. It is man who divided up God's kingdom into heaven, earth and the underworld, and defined the space taken into his possession according to rules of perspective he had constructed first as two- and then as three-dimensional. The Germanic treatment of space, although influenced by laws of Classicism and the anthropomorphic world picture of antiquity, was born out of the immeasurable empty expanse of the steppe. Its indisputable precondition is emptiness; as for Semitic, so also for Germanic and in a wider sense Indo-European peoples, the natural space is an empty space, a large and ascetically empty box with things hanging in it that are seemingly (or actually) linked in a narrative by means of their controversial history, where fates wander about like lonely travellers in desert sands, without finding peace or relief from torturing thirst, to meet their own kind. To find the opposite side, to complement the negative with the positive and the positive with the negative.

The images of Paradise and Hell, which express a dramatic field between two opposite poles, are levelled in the light of Dante Alighieri's allegorical images. Purgatory, the Hill of Purification, rises between the upper and the lower worlds. Starting off from dark 'Gothic woods', the author passes through forests that grow gradually sparser and sparser until he meets a woman who sings and picks flowers that cover the whole winding road before her (Purgatory, XVIII, 40–60). *Noli me tangere*, Giotto's fresco on a wall of Capella degli Scrovegni of Mary Magdalene attempting to be convinced of the reality of Christ resurrected by touching him with a finger, bringing heavenly truth to the earth and placing it in earthly space. Centuries of the re-pouring of the contents follow, with art marking the merging of Neo-Platonic light and its shadow, of idea and form, a world picture in which flesh and blood find a fabulously beautiful place in three-dimensional space.

So the idea of emptiness as God's space, in the sense expressed in the Middle Ages, is replaced by the idea of emptiness as a space measured by the human

dimension, in the sense expressed in the Renaissance, of something in which the Pythagorean theory of figures and Euclidean geometry rule. Monumentalised laws of mechanics have been added to this since the beginning of the 17th century. In the 18th century, science was seized by a great need for organisation. In the 19th century, the picture was complemented by Oxford naturalists' ideas of the self-creation of species, of the world changing in accordance with its own laws, which had not yet been fully discovered by man. The 20th century had relatively little to add to it until Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, as had Dante, opened the gate to new green fields and an understanding of the world in a more distant and deeper, and in any case different, perspective than its three-dimensional essence.

But the world, which we regard as our own, by general agreement, has not significantly changed since the Renaissance. As before, it still represents a large empty box, which has acquired new qualities with the passage of time, but has also been moving away from us to the same degree, due to some kind of intrinsic boredom with the image. The spatial poetic metaphors of the 20th century are Kazimir Malevich's black square and Wassily Kandinsky's abstract geometries, the need for destructuralisation and deconstruction, which takes the whole world apart into small details, starting with Tatlin's Tower (*The Monument to the Third International*) and ending with Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*. The figures in black clinging leotards making funny movements in Jaan Tooming's and Jerzy Grotowsky's theatre are nothing else but the visualisation of Franz Kafka's solitude and Jean-Paul Sartre's sense of the absurd in time and space.

The past, the present and the future, which, as we remember, existed intertwined in man's spirit and consciousness according to St. Augustine, have been hopelessly torn asunder in the Modernist treatment of the world. This has been the case, not just in Le Corbusier's fantasies, but also in conservation, in its aspiration to preserve in an empty space extolled symbols of past glory – churches, monasteries, common graves and lighthouses. The past has been left alone; it has been taken advantage of as was the Virgin, who, having given birth to the Baby, gave her promise to redeem the future. Events appear out of emptiness and disappear into emptiness, being strung on the linear axis of history; it is so easy to describe them in the framework of one or another discourse regarded as part of the historical writing on the eternal struggle between Persians and Greeks, the East and the West, different countries and peoples. The faith in the possibilities

of objective truth born in the Age of the Enlightenment has led to the institutionalisation of the narrative of history; museum culture has put up security gates to guard it and the cult of monuments has established enclaves for it. If it is possible to compare history in the age of Modernism with religion, conservation can be compared with the church serving that religion. On the one hand, there is a circle of Freemason intellectuals at the establishment of that religion, while, on the other hand, all the then pro-imperialist people, regardless of the state whose interests they represented, are also involved in it. Similar to the church or any other institution (the police, the army etc.) at the service of any nation, conservation is concerned that the difference between history and the symbols and organisations explaining and marking that history should be as small as possible, or better still non-existent.

Establishment of a history is accompanied by the wish to delegate one's dreams and ambitions beyond oneself, to invent myths and find the visual symbols or icons of these myths 'in stone and in glass'. Therefore it is the duty of history not just to create myths (which remain behind centuries of European history), but more and more to defend the once-established truth or explanatory work. As in the Modernist (Darwinian) picture of nature, species live separated from each other, being connected through the feeding chain and demonic self-assertion. Albert Camus has written: 'I did not die, a new feeling of hatred stood up one day, at the same time I did, walked toward the door of the niche, opened it, closed it behind me, I hated my people.' (Camus 1958: 53.)

History and mortal fear

Since the very first moments of self-cognition, man (and possibly every other little creature) has been accompanied by mortal fear. That fear of becoming non-existent is characteristic of every living being. Transposing the notion of time beyond ourselves, we also find a reason for this fear. It is ageing: wrinkles, swollen arteries, cracks in walls and crumbling buildings. Since time immemorial people have attempted to postpone ageing. They have taken baths of milk and looked for the elixir of eternal life. One of the most ingenious ways is to have not oneself but a picture painted of oneself, Oscar Wilde's portrait of Dorian Gray, age. But no living being can avoid the inevitable, the cruellest fate, Death itself.

Not being able to free ourselves of the eternal chains established before our time, we realise our dreams not through living flesh but through dead matter. If

not myself, then memory of me should live on – a tablet in the wall of a church, a book on a shelf, a cathedral as the apotheosis of collective will. By declaring certain icons to be eternal and unchanging, society or an individual stops the passage of time, overcomes the sense of his temporary presence, and delegates his ambitions beyond himself. The mission and the duty of one of the undisputed pillars of conservation – the historical Church – is to create around us a safe circle, a closed and static model where things and facts hang in emptiness, like Notre Dame in Paris or like laundry hung out to dry in the wind in Rome or Naples.

All of the above has been nurtured by belief, as if it is possible to separate the past from the present and the present from the future, as if man could escape from the time appointed for him, from the eternal cycle of births and deaths and arrive at something higher and more majestic than himself: a lack of motion and stability. It is because there is emptiness gaping around things, according to static conservation and the static world-view proceeding from it, something that can be defined by the hands of a clock that have stopped at 12, the beginning of the hour of spirits, and which, as something characterising the world we regard as the world itself, is more important than life and the process of time passing from spring to summer and from summer to autumn, the leaves in the trees, and the longing born over and over again on the lips of girls lined up for a traditional flower ceremony somewhere on the island of Bali.

Through our own linguistic experience we are connected with continental ice and the first reindeer herders, who, moving at the borders of Europe's linguistic periphery, have left in our language a large number of words, such as *jää-äär* or *lammasmägi*, which Indo-Europeans find difficult even to pronounce. But there is no word in our language to denote empty space as expressed in English or Russian (respectively *space* or *пространство*). Words such as *taevas* or *ruum* (*ilmaruum*) to denote the cosmos were borrowed, the latter of the two quite recently, only in the past millennium.

The names of things before and after things. Ante res and post res

The inseparable companion and shadow of solitude is the Modernist myth of the independent existence of things, what once made Aristotle assert that Plato, his teacher, was mistaken in the main thing: not ideas but the matter bearing the idea is the true reality, and we get a reliable picture of the world only through the generalisation of separate elements. Universals do not have an independent ontolog-

ical meaning, but '…if anything, it is that which walks or sits or is healthy that is an existent thing. Now these are seen to be more real because there is something definite which underlies them, i.e. the substance or particular.' (*Metaphysics*, 7. 1028a) In fact, particulars are the only realities, the only things about which the world provides firm information, and are thus authentic. Universals and notions have come into existence through the exercise of logic, which is close to science, by means of the abstraction, generalisation and summing up of particulars (their characteristics and components) as the only existing reality.

The following history has only corroborated the views of these two philosophers, whom Raphael depicts in the Stanze del Vaticano descending almost hand in hand down the steps of the temple of philosophy. On the one hand, light exists because of man, its existence being the inevitable precondition of his existence; on the other hand, man exists only because of the existence of light. The art between them is the mediator between two different autonomous creative forces, the demiurge and the autochthon, between the universal-centred macrocosm and the particular-centred microcosm. Of these, light, a bright and never-recurring idea, dominates in Plato's philosophy, casting shadows, and from the shadows artists draw inspiration, collecting it almost like grains of gold washed out of a river.

Describing the history of European art as a semiotic chain, where the work of God is situated at one end and that of man at the other end, the bearers of two ideologies that have become polarised from each other are eastern and western Christianity; on the one hand, conviction in the canonical power of general laws and initial images, while on the other hand, the inevitable cult of the particular and the unique. In the iconology of the Eastern church, truth relies on endless repetition of the original idea (of which the picture of the Virgin painted by St. Luke the Evangelist can be seen as an example); in the Western church the Aristotelian theory of exceptional substance[1] never recurring in time and space rises to the fore, starting with the 11th century, largely under the influence of Arab culture. Scholastic thinking of the 12th–13th centuries, in its subtly organised intellectuality, set itself against the earlier intuitive mystic tradition. Mediaeval realism, according to which general notions existed before things (*ante res*), was

[1] As in the case of any finalised statement, it is largely conditional to contra-distinguish also Plato and Aristotle on the basis of universality and individuality, being rather connected with the historical reception of the two philosphers' views in academic cultural history.

replaced by mediaeval universalism, where general notions only come into existence as a result of the universalisation of the particular and the unique, and so exist after things (*post res*).

Side by side with light, the Middle Ages set the meaning of the Church, the institution structuring that light, presenting the concept of its contents and framework (idea and form) through its most poetic metaphors: the cathedral, stained glass, and the theory of metaphysical aesthetics of scholars of the Sorbonne and Cologne. In the 12th century the Aristotelian theory of the unity of content, form and meaning appeared beside Neo-Platonism. While, on the level of religion, nominalism became a compromise between the unity of substance and its three states, in art and culture the separate road of Western culture meant an ever-deeper schism between the eastern worship of idols, repetition and tradition and the cult of genius that rose to become the ideal for the Western artist.

St. Francis of Assisi discovered the beauty of birdsong and the meaning of a single blade of grass. On the walls of the Basilica of St. Francis, Giotto painted scenes of the life of the saint, highlighting specific features of phenomena, in which the idea is expressed not through colour alone but also through individual form. Art acquired the meaning that we have been accustomed to attribute to it since the Renaissance. Ruling out the programmatic art of Classicism focused on the aesthetic interpretation of an earlier visual system, the person of genius acquired importance in the case of the Western Church and civilisation, and became a man who steps on the fervid arena of history with the marshal's baton in his sack. Art means the artist's creation, something unique and never recurring, created by a single individual, something that is only born in a flash of inspiration and is thus not a matter of generalising deduction but of one-off intuition.

Art as a relic

Greek art philosophy, which can be regarded as the dominant one with regard to the Western art of Catholic traditions until our times (at least until the 20th century), needs visual symbols for its confirmation. The age-old discussion between two ideological fronts – the war between iconodules and iconoclasts that broke out from between church walls and flared out into street battles during the times of Bernard of Clairvaux or Martin Luther has always kept the role and name of art.

The times when Herodotus travelled across the blue Mediterranean to Persia, where he was stunned by, apart from the fire altar, the sacrificial ceremony to the

invisible, are now buried deep under layers of European cultural awareness. The Semitic word and the Greek image were forged into one in the imperial cultural factories of Rome. Side by side with the texts of the Torah, which bring to us oral tradition of what once was, of our forefathers' heroic deeds, as well as of the sufferings and choices of the Jewish people, we have altars in houses of God where the message is transmitted not by means of verbal texts but in a visual language.

Visual images have the meaning of signs, and signs of symbols, while the meaning of symbols is either philosophical or religious. Not just canonised texts but, ever since the fall of the Roman Empire, also religious objects help us remember and value the past. In addition to their prophetic power of annunciation, they also perform the role of confirming the existence of faith. History relies not on oral tradition alone; the methods of its reconstruction are different epic ballads and myths, its proof being in documents of things that once were. So conservation, as a science of holy things, began not from the reading of Sumerian cuneiform tablets or texts on Etruscan gravestones, but much earlier, when Adam's skull was found on Christ's grave and when St. Mark's bones arrived in Venice.

The first portrait of the Virgin Mary was painted by St. Luke the Evangelist. Later artists only had the easy task of repeating and re-repeating (restoring) what had once been, of acceding to the expression of visual art their patron had established. At first relics were considered to be more truthful than art and they were procured by means of crusades. St. Louis paid a huge sum to the Latin emperor Baldwin II of Constantinople for Jesus' crown of thorns in 1238. Ten years later, in 1248, a masterpiece of Gothic architecture, Sainte-Chapelle, a poem in stone and glass, was completed in its honour. Side by side with relics brought back from the Holy Land, the bones of saints or those who had suffered because of religion somewhere in Spain or in the Alps were raised to the status of holiness, to satisfy the growing thirst for Christian truth. As demand increased, painted copies of Christ and his martyrs were placed on the altar.

Art replaces bone and flesh. The image is made equal with the thing itself, the original with its painted copy. The cultural picture of the Renaissance (devotion) is nothing but a painted relic on canvas documenting the presence of history and forecasting its inevitable demise. The copy rises to the place of the original. Art becomes the new religion; *arte* facts become relics of a new age, priced in kilograms of gold and hundredweights of silver. The tradition which goes back more than a thousand years in Rome, brings forward the requirement that the

artist's work should be holy. In 1341 Petrarch had himself wreathed as the prince of poets in the light of torches on Capitol Hill. An artist, who, almost aware of his future role, painted himself on the altar, carved himself into stone and wrote his name – Michelangelo – on the statue of the *Pietà*, emerged instead of the anonymous master, whose authenticity was measured by his power to bring to the congregation eternal light. Art became religion.

The museum rose to stand side by side with the church. In 1471 Pope Sixtus IV opened the first public art collection in the Palazzo dei Conservatori. History became the heir of religious truth in the true sense of the word, and conservation became its castle. In order not to err in its ritual cult, European cultural awareness placed several orders, with all their necessary hierarchies and priests to guard its legacy. Conservators and restorers carried out ritual procedures at the instructions of art historians, museologists and conservationists, whose duty it was to find the elixir of eternal life, to give things a second and even a third life, to find the key making it possible for things around us to last even longer, to cross the humanly inaccessible line between life and death, to help the world around us to last longer than us.

About authenticity

Holy objects brought back from the Holy Land received a written certificate as they arrived in Rome or Venice from Constantinople. A saint's relic without a certificate had no meaning. Only a successful result of the authenticity test ensures inclusion of some ritual place of cult in national lists of monuments and, only after an even more serious check in the pages of the World Heritage List. Before being picked as one of the selected few, it is necessary to give blood, to have X-rays taken. For what could be a bigger mistake in the eyes of religion (conservation) than to consider the product of a quite modest provincial dauber the work of some great master. For art to be art it must pass the requirements of the holy authenticity test.

The whole history of European conservation is characterised by a search for truth – the singular and elusive *vera carne*, regardless of whether it is hidden in documented historical facts or aesthetic simulacra. On the one hand we demand a document to prove the originality of one or another work of art, while, on the other, we want something more when a work comes down to us from the darkness of times – to receive art both in its originality as well as in its integrity, to

make demands that one and the same object must satisfy the needs of our truth and justice both in the ethical and aesthetic contexts, to bear scars of the past, and yet look young and beautiful.

January 14, 1506. The Laocoön Group, found in the *thermae* of Caracalla, inspired Michelangelo to picture it whole, with the missing right hand of the father and the left hand of the son. This triggered the first restoration tender organised by Donato Bramante, leading to the Laocoön Group, first repaired with wax, then gypsum, then terra cotta, and finally it was removed again in the name of eternity. So art became truth, or as Antonio Canova wrote to Lord Elgin, when he arrived in London in 1815, where he was given the assignment of restoring the relieves of the Parthenon: 'I admire in them the truth of nature combined with the choice of beautiful forms: every thought about them breathes animation, with a singular truth of expression, and without the least affection of the pomp of art… The naked figures are real flesh in the native beauty.'[2]

Canova was asked to restore the old carved reliefs damaged by time and by the Turks' inadvertence. Upon this the artist, who had risen to become the prefect of stones and marble of Rome, declared: 'They are sacred, it is impossible to restore them!' Thus, the task was passed on, not only to the 19th-century dominant English antiquarianism but in wider terms also to the whole modern, even Modernist, conservation. Willam Hazlitt wrote in 1819: 'So the Elgin marbles are more impressive from their mouldering, imperfect state. They transport us to the Parthenon, and old Greece. The Theseus is of the age of Theseus, while the Apollo di Belvedere is a modern fine gentleman, and we think of this last figure only as an ornament to the room where it happens to be placed.' (Quoted in Larsson 1998: 240.) So the phenomenon already known from relics reoccurred in connection with works of art – Western culture, being oriented to documentation of material substance, has a higher opinion of a part or fragment of something that has existed before than of the whole story. The truth of a particular is more important than universal truth.

[2] Cited from the book *On Philosophical Differences in Restoration between Bertel Thorvaldsen and Antonio Canova*, see in closer detail Lars Olof Larsson's 'Thorvaldsen Restaurierung der Aegina – Skulpturen in Lichte Zeitgenössischer Kunstkritik und Antikenauffassung' (Larsson 1998: 254).

Classicism versus Romanticism

The roots of modern European conservation lie in the Age of Enlightenment, more precisely in its two paradigmatically different traditions – Classicism and Romanticism, in other words in the Apollonian and the Dionysian elements. According to the law of the pendulum, the European consciousness of art oscillates between those two different sources, the absolute, *a priori*, that is, between the truth existing before us (*ante res*) and the truth derived *post factum* by ourselves, and the notion of authenticity proceeding from it. Novelty and innovation, the particular side by side with the universal, plays a significant, mostly even a more important, role side by side with the canon and repetition.

The semiotic structure of Classicism is made particularly complicated by its double play with words and values. Contrary to those of the classical art of the antique, the reasons of Classicism lie not in visual signs themselves, but in the repetition of the same visual signs in accordance with the new age and its requirements.[3] Classicism, contrary to what is often believed, marks a double play with words. On the one hand, the pair of notions of 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' in the words of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (2000: 455) emphasise the need for the restoration of what has been before; on the other hand, the same grand simplicity carries a revolutionary message of the age that it must bring to us, but its language of signs can be interpreted not so much as a message of visual aesthetics but as a verbal communication.

From the authenticity of Classicism it picks out, above all, the ideological and philosophical parameters embedded in it, of which one of the major prophets of Classicism used notions from the phraseology of the Christian cult of relics to express his views. The holy and the untouchable simultaneously mark the unique and the unattainable; something that once was cannot ever be repeated because of the sacral message stored in it.

So the 19th and the 20th centuries are revolutionary by nature, susceptible to changes, reconstructing the past for itself in the name of the future, regardless of whether the building blocks are holy and untouchable facts of history, held together by the force of narrative, or the faith of the future, of the possibility of the recreation of the past as a visual integrity. As Georg Dehio, a man born in Tallinn who launched his career at Tartu University, has said, conservation has

[3] In closer detail see Maiste 2003a: 122–136.

two different daughters – one of them, illegal, is Gothic Revival, and the other is legal, its verbal equivalent being restoration. While the message of the former is persistence of the spirit (idea) outside the immediate material substance, the other is nurtured by a way of thinking about the unique nature of creation and the requirement Dehio expressed in 1905: 'To conserve, not to restore!' (Dehio 1905: 24.) In the case of the former we speak of ideologies of Historicism, in the case of the latter of those of Modernism.

The artistic and the critical in restoration

Georg Dehio and his generation conclude the discussion between two fundamentally different treatments – restoration and anti-restoration, which sprang from the restoration of Laocoön and Apollo di Belvedere. The former is associated with the nostalgic idea of the dominant power of style, as the objective truth expressing the spirit of the age and the idea of history and being higher than the individual will of the artist; the latter is linked to the singularity of the work of a no-less-romantic individual genius. As prophets there are two intellectuals of exceptional power standing at the two above-mentioned approaches: the French architecture restorer Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, restorer of Notre-Dame (together with J.-B. A. Lassus), the cathedrals of Reims and Amiens and rebuilder of the medieval castles of Pierrefonds, and Carcassonne, who has said, '…forms and proportions exist in their universality, it is man's duty to discover them. Style is the illustration of the ideal. As concrete conditions of nature led to the birth of a concrete type of crystals, which in their turn served as the basis for the formation of mountains, so the available opportunities in harmony with the supreme structures of the world exist in the human brain.' (Viollet-le-Duc 1863: 112.)

Although Viollet-le-Duc mostly speaks in the name of Gothic, the spirit of French rationalism and of Classicism, its aesthetic canon, still echoes in his words. In counterbalance to Viollet-le-Duc, a quite different approach to restoration develops away from the Paris parlours and revolutionary flames. John Ruskin, emerging from the academic circle of Oxford scholars, devoted his energy to proving that things are not just things but above all bearers of the history of ideas and the spirit. In his description of architecture, Ruskin applies the metaphoric comparison of seven lamps: sacrifice, truth, power, beauty, life, memory and obedience. Ruskin's lamp of memory reads like a holy script: 'For,

indeed, the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, or in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity.' (Ruskin 1890: 284.) Architecture and its particular fact have become relics, which are valued as a metaphor, a metaphysical expression evoked by universality.

The household of a moral person is holy like a temple, 'God is present in every household, and it would be a sacrilege to destroy His altar.' (Jokilehto 1999: 179.) For Ruskin the truth of restoration meant truth not restoration. In 1845 Ruskin wrote to his father: 'Let them take the greatest possible care of all they have got, & when care will preserve it no longer, let it perish inch by inch, rather than retouch it.' (Ruskin 1972; quoted in Jokilehto 1999: 180.) These lines, which became classics of the restoration philosophy of the 20th century, open, on the one hand, the road to the cult of the individual and the authentic and, on the other hand, to anti-restoration. William Morris finds restoration equal to crime (Jokilehto 1999: 184). His statement 'Restoration is a crime' opens the conservation discourse of the age of Modernism. Paradoxically, the prophet himself spoke of the printing of incunabula in Geoffrey Chaucer's spirit.

Modernist conservation

Raising art to a higher position completely independent of nature, Immanuel Kant takes a step forward from Winkelmann's theory of imitation. The next generation, including, for example, August Wilhelm Schlegel, speaks of art as an independent system, saying that 'art is like nature, capable of independent creation, organisation, of building living things … like the solar system, the intrinsic skill contained in it is capable of change, development and eternal return' (Schlegel 1801–1802; quoted in Kultermann 1990: 63). Instead of art the art philosophy of the 20th century focuses on the work of art, what Michel Foucault has defined as something coming into existence in close relationship with the object, yet a phenomenon infinitely distanced from it, a calligramme, the cracking of which will not bring a solution of the puzzle, but, side by side with what is depicted in the picture, directs the observer's attention 'to the small space running above the words and below the drawings' (Foucault 1983: 28).

Side by side with art as a source of information, a means of communication and a special means of self-expression, attention is turning more and more to art

as a separate (isolated) value, something that, according to Martin Heidegger, is installation or erection (*Errichtung*) of the act of art, which is followed by the dedication and glorification (*Weihung und Rühmung*) of the work of art. To dedicate means to consecrate (*heiligen*) (Heidegger 2001).

So we have delegated to a work our greatest hopes, have placed it on heights, where it no longer communicates with us (at least not after completion), not just because of its character but also because of its frame, which, besides the fact, limits also emptiness. We have placed art into a frame and hung the frame on a wall. Having declared a work of art holy in advance, 'Official agencies assume the care and maintenance of works. Connoisseurs and critics busy themselves with them. Art dealers supply the market. Art-historical study makes the works the objects of a science.' (Heidegger 2001: 192.) Truth is not inside us but beside and in front of us. Art exists outside our own wishes; more than that – art exists outside its own wishes, being defined by the wish of the establishments and institutions that had originally been appointed to take care of art. The church will take over religion. Having gained possession of the facts, art history establishes its own story, defines the place of one or another work of art, either on the wall, on the shelf or on the restorer's work table.

In accordance with the Modernist art concept, art is a divine thing, a holy and sanctified creation that begins with nothingness, where the word becomes flesh and where '…a Greek temple … portrays nothing. It simply stands there in the middle of the rock-cleft valley. The building encloses the figure of the god, and in this concealment lets it stand out into the holy precinct through the open portico. [---] This presence of the god is in itself the extension and delimitation of the precinct as a holy precinct.' (Heidegger 2001: 192.) Twentieth century art philosophy replaces the notion of art with God's creation; art means highlighting the sublime, making darkness visible through the organisation of emptiness and by rules known to it alone. The artist is one who informs and not who is informed. According to Cesare Brandi, art, once ready, moves away from its creator and the reasons that had inspired its creator and launches on an independent life. 'The distinctive nature of the work of art as reality, which is perceived without ever being identified with the physical reality of perceived object, is the reason itself for the renowned, fundamental aporia of aesthetics that could be summarised thus: art cannot be defined with sole reference to works of art because an empirical approach of this sort would imply a criterion for the selection of the works, hence it

would presuppose the concept of art; nor can it be defined a priori in the absence of an experience of individual works of art.' (Philippot 2005: 28.)

As Brandi demonstrated, the aporia arises from the fact that art cannot be conceptualised in the same way as existing reality. 'As a consequence, art history, as history of poetics, is the only possible from of scientific study of art and it thereafter supplants aesthetics.' (Philippot 2005: 28.) Art is only art and does not mean anything else than the artistic combination of a man to explain the world through the media and boundaries of art. Art becomes a value that, according to a quondam definition by Alois Riegl, has in advance been declared an 'intentional' monument (*gewollte Denkmal*), which, because of its inherent qualities of age, art, use etc., has been declared something untouchable and lasting, something that requires the attention of a high degree of sensitivity and that has been preserved as intentional monuments in unintentional historical monuments (Riegl 1982: 26–31).

Art as a commodity

In the first half of the 20th century, art and its creator, the artist, merged into one. The artist was satisfied with himself. In the latter half of the same century the artist merged into one with the world around him, he became a part of the consumer society oriented to the all-powerful market, someone whose aim was to produce art objects which would no longer be put into a frame and hung on a wall, but would be put into the safety of bank deposit boxes and museum catalogues. The profession of the connoisseur became dominant. The great specialist was the one who knew what was valued and for what reasons one or another object of art was valued. While in the Age of the Enlightenment art became an object, in the 20th century it became a commodity, the price of which is defined not by the artist and the immediate receiver of art but by the art connoisseur and the merchant. Art escaped from the street into a church and from the church into a monastery.

Whoever remains outside the walls is a consumer of art, a person who may even have seen in his mind's eye the opportunity of having a share in art, proceeding from his own modest person. Art is stored and transported, packaged and marketed, new terms appear in the vocabulary – for example the transport of culture and art trade.[4] For the primary duty of each consumer in the consumer

[4] In 2003 I had the opportunity to speak at an international conference on art trade and traffic in Copenhagen, where I defended ideas of art as poetry (see Maiste 2003b).

society is consumption, acquisition of one or another work, a fact of art through a system called into existence for that purpose and through a person representing it. Art, which some time ago still found confirmation in itself, must eventually retreat into a museum, where particular objects are already hovering in solitude before it – works of art previous generations have appointed for preservation and conservation. Whoever wants to get to Parnassus must not only know the essence of art and the laws traditionally connected with it but must equally be able to take his bearings in the social paradigm of the laws of science of modern society. In the assessment of a work of art, the frame and the empty wall are perhaps even more important than the work of art itself.

A tower for each Paide and a Mona Lisa for each National Museum

So the notions 'place' and 'site', the meanings and values of which are connected with the individual and the experiential, and the notion of authenticity in the sense of the Modernist world-view have now lost their earlier attractiveness. The consumer society is looking for signs that are familiar to it, no matter which exotic island it travels to. Robinson Crusoe finds a whole group of his peers on coastal dunes. The virtual world is capable of producing any image from any part of the world, within as brief a moment as possible. We have got history under our administration. We are cloning not mammals alone, but also culture. In order to see and hear the world, we do not have to move at all; on the contrary, we can move the world at our own discretion on our own blue screens. Reliefs of both the Parthenon and Apollo di Belvedere are posted on the Internet.

So the world speaks with me in a language which, in its general notions, is already fixed in my memory, formed in contact with the collective ego. The signs are ready, and it is my role to recognise them, to acquire and learn them. My personal history, what I experience either in bed at home or in the mathematics class at school, retreats before the conventions of history. The particular must step aside. Because who will need anything new and original, who would care for creation, a stormy river rising over its banks, who would remember the joys and worries of the hippy generation if we have at our disposal giant machines of history, by means of which the Great Miller may emerge not just from the shade of some scholar's bookshelves but as countless copies of a body that has already been materially created? We ask for a tower for each Paide and a Mona Lisa for each national museum.

But we have to remember that repetition provoked by the need, born in the age of national romanticism, to mark the graves of our kings, and repetition associated with the technical quality of the post-Modernist age stand for two fundamentally different phenomena. The question of the original and the copy, which rises in the medieval cult of relics and is expressed in the aspiration for genius of Renaissance art and the following age of Romanticism, retreats under the more direct or indirect influence of the qualities pertaining to the society of the second half of the 20th century: welfare, willingness to compromise and success.

History acquires a new role; its artistic signs, born either (quoting Foucault) through a plastic manner of depiction or affirmation, regardless of whether they correspond to the traditions of painting before or after Kandinsky (Foucault 1983: 32–33), can today be interpreted in a totally new context. The problems of similarity and identity treated by classical art history and the philosophy of conservation proceeding from it acquire a new meaning at the beginning of the new century.

Art is what has been declared art. The role of art is relatively small in this declaration. It is because the criteria we value are not born anywhere in the streets of Florence or Verona or in the Bohemian quarters of Paris, but in large art halls and galleries. That is, in museums! Art history is 'established' in the way Markus Hiekkanen, one of the best specialists of medieval Finnish churches, declares in the case of those churches (Hiekkanen 2003). Such requirements of general and standardised truth rely not so much on the mechanisms of the creation of an individual work of art as on the presentation of universal values and series born on the basis of a common idea. Identity serves representation, although no longer dependent on the will of the individual but, at first sight, on impersonal (i.e. non-hierarchical) systems created by the society as a whole. Universals, which according to Plato are hidden somewhere in the treasuries of the First Mover, have in the sense of our times been created in the framework of the dominating taste, trend or brand, in the silence of lamb-cloning laboratories and institutions representing works of art.

So one of the central issues of art and art history – associations between innovation and tradition, or the original and the copy – have received a different meaning. A particular is not merely a particular, the result of a unique creative process, but expresses certain universal values already from the moment of its birth, the forwarding and continuation of which is not within the powers of one

or another person, for example the artist; there are very many people standing at the birth of values. As much as art, society also needs art history to explain art, and it also needs the media to make both of them visible. The almightiness of the media returns art to the street, out from between the walls of the museum that has become its prison. The presumption of an artistic act is the environment, vivid interest and support by society, and not just Robinson Crusoe but a large number of Robinsons, all of whom have landed on a desert island, standing before its government.

About yearning for the present

So many notions that have been part of the last reserve of cultural identity have lost their earlier meanings. Instead of an empty and hierarchical world, we have to deal with an environmental and democratic world, where the power of the majority can not only carry out revolutionary destructive acts (as we know them from the age of Modernism following the French Revolution), but also be a precondition for the launching of creative processes, the aims of which have widened from pinpointing the unique nature of searches for the particular to focusing on more general causes. Universal once again equals reality. Side by side with the presentation of future scenarios, general notions born in the high voltage of the media chambers and channels of society take over description of events of the past, both the written language of history as well as the visual language of songs.

Having inherited the cultural space, the call of which is the loneliness of the steppe, the need to define oneself on the axis of time proceeding from the creation of the three spatial axes, and the linear world to the Last Judgement, today's world has taken a step towards a multitude of ideas and cultures and their intercommunication. History, which should either support or describe these processes, has unfortunately not managed to keep pace with the rapidly occurring new needs. History, regardless of the manner in which we treat and describe it, is still in the previous millennium in terms of the network of its narratives and institutions. Many words regarded as the cream of history, such as 'event', 'fact', 'original', 'copy' or 'patina', have a breath of past millennia about them. They have the effect of metaphors of a disappearing civilisation still sticking out of the water. They lack any meaning in today's fast-changing world.

So Christian civilisation is in a situation where, instead of repeating notions that have belonged to the archaeological treasury all through history, it is forced

to look for new outlets. On the one hand it has to invent ever new worlds and, on the other hand, it has to reread old texts, which, like St. Augustine's teaching, are about two different times, one human and final and the other divine and lasting. Instead of an objective treatment of time and history, it has to speak of subjective, non-lasting things, which are hard to describe in general categories, something that, in counterbalance to the icons propagated by the mass media, would form the axis and reason of our being.

All through history, the cultural awareness of Europe, with its central notions, has regarded the past and the future as its central notions, warning us to respect the former, but to find an expression for our happiness and self-realisation in the future. Through centuries (and millennia), these two notions have been dramatically separated from each other. This has not only been because conservationists, who should help the past continue also in the future, have not had the capacity or, what is even more important, the will to do it. Rather, the link to unite the two parts of the above chain, the present, has been missing. The static world picture, at the beginning of which stand both ideas of causal materialism proceeding from Isaac Newton and ideas of the idealism of the Age of the Enlightenment, has simply been unable to adopt all the fundamental statements of the theory of relativity.

In the widest sense, laws of mechanics are reflected in our world picture. Conservation, which attempts to bring values of the past out of the fire of the future, is born of the idea, as if things could become the proof of their efforts – things, not ideas, laws, not people, graveyards, not the living flesh of history, which continues to live a thousand times sooner in a beach tavern of any 'forgotten' island in the middle of the Aegean Sea than in the metope figures of the virginal goddess Athena 'forgotten' in the British Museum. In order to participate in history, in order to enjoy and not only to understand, it is advisable to step out of the museum into the street, from the temple into an environment where the experiential, and often extremely subjective, aspect of history is heard side by side with history as convention. In order to understand what riches the word 'restoration' can hide, I recommend going into the jungle in the company of beautiful dark girls on a Saturday evening in order to plait wreaths of lotus flowers for the consecration ceremony starting over and over again every Sunday.

What we actually lack is the present, regardless of whether facts of history hang between the arches of an amphitheatre or between temple pillars, or wheth-

er we are situated in a prehistoric Estonian stronghold or a kolkhoz barn, where *Estonian Ballads* (*Eesti ballaadid*) by Veljo Tormis was performed. It is because it is not the Future that is revelational, or the Past that is being written over and over again in the name of changing aims, but the Present – that singular moment free both of Hegel's yearning for system and Heidegger's protest against that same system. The Present is what we miss most of all – the Present as the only actual reality – tangible, sensible, tactile, consistent and born over and over again in the maternal womb. Because, as St. Augustine wrote, '*Your years are but one day* …, and your day is not 'every day' but 'today', since your today does not give way to your tomorrow, nor take over from your yesterday. Your today is eternity.…' (*Confessiones*, 11.14.16.)

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