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### Answers to the Three Questions

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#### **Is modernity our antiquity?**

Yes, because modernity is that which one cannot be without, as we cannot be without antiquity. If it is annihilated, miraculously there is increased nostalgia for what we have lost and it is returned. It is similar to the return of antiquity in the past (most recently in the classicist period of avant-garde artists). How did Marx say it? Antique art exceeds the dimensions of the socio-economic structure of that time and acts as a paradigm, but a paradigm which can never be fulfilled.

Confrontation with antique art generally ends in ruin, but this ruin often leads to the discovery of new art, which “goes its own way”. One of the most productive ruins of this type is Wagner, whose musical celebrations in Bayreuth emulated a great Athenian Dionysian Mysteries. His “falseness”, which was noted by Nietzsche and analyzed by Adorno, provided one of the points against which the musical avant-garde defined itself, see Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring*.

Modernity is our antiquity in that it offers a similar paradigm, which keeps returning but cannot be fulfilled. Its function is to call forth failing repetition. It presents a mediating form, which serves to form new content, which then finds another form corresponding to what has been created. But with post-modernity it is otherwise. It can be understood as counter-position, in which the extraction and disappearance of a form occurs as a relative point, happening because content has been freed from form (under the motto of unshackling singularity). Except that it is soon seen that this freedom leads to a dead end – content free of form dispersed endlessly in the end becomes Nothing, it ceases to exist even as singularity. Freedom from form is the demise

of singularity. The question is how to get to another phase, in which freedom is joined with form (form being what enables freedom and stipulates content). This third phase would represent a return to modernity, similar to the return to antiquity after the Middle Ages – it would be necessary to return to past forms, which enable the creation of new content following the disintegration of all forms. Fulfillment of post-modernism is in its overcoming, which consists of a return to modernism as a requisite for art following the end of art. This return would resemble all returns – it would be a new beginning. Re-birth, re-naissance is above all birth of the new, mediated by the animation of “dead” paradigmatic forms. Modernity is our antiquity, because it offers form, which is temporarily necessary – the Renaissance was not the revival of an antique corpse, but the revival of a live body, the single point of departure from the dead point in which the living were embedded. Let the dead revive the dead. Resurrection of the dead always revives someone else – those who are living.

### **What is bare life?**

Bare life is a category which may begin to be applied again. During the unfortunate times of so-called welfare state, this concept was incomprehensible – it was the past, it was a subject of old painters and writers, it was a reminder of life on the far away island of privation. Now “bare life” begins to appear as a real possibility (nobody is sure that one day they will not fall to the bottom of society), but we still do not know what to make of it – is it truly the case that life exists once again deprived of all cultural, social, and relational significance, reduced to a struggle for survival? Bare life is a metaphor for the struggle for survival, which appears archaic. The new century is a return of the one before last. The present is the past perfect. “Bare life” is a traumatic category, pressed into political unconsciousness, since we are not used to using past tenses for the contemporary. But many secretly hoped that “bare life” would reappear, since they despaired of the idiocy of the “happy life” in a late capitalist society of excess. The reappearance of bare life has in itself something liberating, it is the materialization of critical social thought, which has already lost faith in itself. Now appears the trap of cynicism: we know that life for many people has been reduced to a bare existence, but we have learned to live with it – it is “natural”. We will not escape the trap of cynicism by beginning to compare – our misery with the “overall quality of life” in the sixties of our mothers or grandmothers.

Such comparison is suspect, because it shows not only the misery of the present but also the misery of the past (the sixties as a golden age has been illuminated from the perspective of the present, which traces its own misery predictably to the sixties – the “cultural revolution” of western students as the mycelium of post-modernism, Cohn-Bendit with the revolutionary image legitimizing the power politics of the EU.) The present and past in this sense belong to each other – the post-modern may be seen as a fulfillment of the cultural revolution of the sixties. “Bare life” itself is a starting point, even if it is at first perceived as an element of foreign origins in our conceptual universe. Bare existence is for the time being difficult to represent in present, and therefore we learn the past perfect – bringing Brecht, Steinbeck, Dickens, and Hugo up to date. Bare existence is a traumatic point, which tears the hermetically sealed world of the consumer ideology depicted by Adorno, Marcuse, and Debord. Many breathed easy: revolution need not only be cultural.

### **What is to be done?**

Hegel wrote about the end of art, Fukuyama about the end of history. First of all, neither of them need be right. Hegel’s court of the end of art was cut short (at least temporarily) by the avant-garde. Fukuyama’s opinion is at the very least refuted by the fact that history rolls uncontrollably onward giving rise to the most varied catastrophic phantasmata. It is time to rid ourselves of endism – everything important has ended and now comes persiflage, collages, games, installations... Thus, the end of endism. The second necessary thing is to renew faith in art and in politics despite contemporary art and politics (“post-politics”), an act which surpasses the context of today. The main trouble is that art has been dominated by reflexivity, which Hegel associated with its end – art becomes a reflection of the position of art in the contemporary world, a reflection of its inability. The avant-garde was able to end this reflexivity by occupying an ironic distance from the given society – we will not take up the position of art in this world, because this bourgeois world is falling apart anyway. We are interested in how art inserts elements of a liberated world into the present, in which art intertwines with socio-economic reality. The paradox is that in post-modern late capitalism a similar joining has occurred – esthetics has become a production value (the esthetic value of goods is more important than the use-value). The difference between these two arts is that the post-modern version is

based on the expansion of exchange into art (art as commodity), whereas in the society emancipated from commodity exchange art is to extend its freedom into reality. But perhaps we have dwelled too much on art and not come to terms with its conditionality. Even if its end comes and art survives only as a reflection of its negation, the opportunity arises once more that this loss of art will be constitutive for art of the future (if it comes) – this could be negation of this negation. In the end however this possibility is associated with a new beginning of politics, in which the perspective of another world appears. As with the avant-garde, today's art is mutually dependent on political upheaval – the greater the hope for a liberating socio-economic breakthrough, the more direct energy in art and conversely, the more pent up the situation, the more reflexivity in art. The main question of art should be what to do in politics, the main question of politics should be how to approximate art.