

ART AND NATION-STATE*

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A Nation-State is a centralized and sovereign organization of political power. To be sovereign means that the system is self-sustainable, self-manageable and independent. It represents a kind of power which has no other artificial power of human-origin above it. A Nation-State is a power which has its one and only centre in itself.

But, the theories and ideologies which have legitimized Nation, State and Art in modernity are today somehow de-constructed, or, at least, they have experienced what we usually call “cultural turn”.

1 A New approach to “Nation”

Ernest Gellner has built foundations, together with quite influential Eric Hobsbawm’s ideas on the subject, for new theories of nation and nation-building processes. It is his idea that liberals and Marxists alike shared the same error when they forgot about the power of romantic nationalism. “Nationalism feeds on cultural differences; it turns from them into a principle of political loyalty and social identity (true). Cultural differences are systematically eroded by the processes which constitute the coming of modern society (true). So the more modern societies become, the less material there is for nationalism to work on. (The conclusion follows irresistibly from the premises which are true.) Ergo, nationalism is on the way out. QED.”¹ But this syllogism proved to be completely wrong, and by explaining why it is so we can arrive at a better theory of nation and nationalism.

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¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nationalism*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1995, p. 2.

If we put the syllogism into Central, Eastern and Southern European, or Mediterranean perspective, we will see a way of reasoning which was and still is present there. When has such reasoning been used in actual political circumstances and by whom? This kind of Western liberal and Marxist leftist social science has always been mobilized when the interests of the already existing Western, Soviet, or world order colluded with new national liberation movements. There is not much difference between this kind of syllogisms, and the Hegelian theory of historical and non-historical nations, the first raised on the level of independent statehood and the second doomed to submit to them or/and disappear. We are not dealing here just with a case of a false conclusion due to an absent third factor, as Gellner thinks. We have at the same time a case of false pretensions on the side of the speaker of this syllogism, who puts himself or herself on neutral ground, as someone untouched by nationalist discourse. Both premises deny to the Others, i.e. primitive and undeveloped people, the ability to complete their emancipation from the cultural to the political sphere. The historical use of the syllogism was to confirm the inevitable and unchangeable difference between democratic European nations and backward Balkan, Slavic, Oriental or African organic and primitive societies; or, to describe national movements as movements in the wrong direction, which sometimes might be used for a revolutionary perspective and at other times annihilated in the name of the same perspective. From Gellner's position of criticism, it becomes clear that nations were products and constructions of modernism and not something pre-existent, which at the same time means that this organic and primitive image of uncivilized nations which have to be put under inspection and despotic rule is the constructed result of modernization as well. And, by the way, some theories of globalization have just extended to global application this syllogism criticized by Gellner, and announced the end of the nation once again.

Everyday expressions which distinguish between First, Second, and Third Worlds are carved from the same iceberg that hides under the surface of integration into a multicultural and unified humanity, a nationalism of the Nation-State firstcomers and earlycomers. Beside romantic nationalism as the forgotten third partner in the game, as mentioned by Gellner, there is a hidden ghost-partner of non-romantic nationalism in the first two premises. The first premise hides the fact that the nationalism that successfully turned cultural differences into a systematic principle of political loyalty and social identity, is the nationalism which successfully constituted the Nation-State of the speaker of this premise. It hides the fact that the modern liberal democratic state, a model offered for new democracies, was and is a product of nationalism as well.

The need to construct new theory of nation and nationalism arose from the failure of the prevailing theories of the past to account for actual events and movements, because nations and nationalisms did not follow the inevitable conclusion of the syllogism. What old theories could do finally was just to put more or less stress on the evil strength of the atavistic natural forces of blood, soil and language which may triumph over modernist progress, or, on the other side, glorify the eternal power of the same forces. A new way had to be tested with a new premise: nations are not as old as history, they are products of modernism.² While we may agree that nations were formed and even produced in the modern period, it is still useful to remember that this shift from premodern roots to modernist construction still allows modernist differentiation between premodern as natural and organic, and modern as artificial and constructed. If nation is believed to be premodern, it is treated as a state of nature that has to be transcended in the manner of Hobbes, or embraced, as in the manner of Rousseau. That is what even new titles inform us of, as *The Invention of Tradition* edited by Eric Hobsbawm in 1994, who in his introduction claims that there are three categories of the systems of social management, the first being: "...a) those establishing or symbolising social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial (underline added by L. K.)."³

This shows very well that a shift from the allegedly "natural" or "eternal" existence of nations to their "modern" and "artificial" construction was necessary and long due. But, at the same time it keeps in the field the modernist division between natural and artificial, and between modern and premodern. The short and, at first view unimportant, introduction of *real or artificial* groups is the consequence of such primary divisions, and it certainly provides a basis for speaking of, for instance, people as a real community and a nation as an artificial one, or a monogamous family as natural and "promiscuity" as artificial. The liberal fight against the spectre of nationalism sooner or later brings out the distinction between people and nation as two unreconcilable principles, the first being liberal democratic and second being fundamentalist; and an enlightenment fight against *the kingdoms of darkness* sooner or later brings out the distinction between progressively oriented societies, and those which are

² In preface to his "Nations and Nationalisms since 1780", Hobsbawm mentions as fathers of such statements Charleton B. Hayes and Hans Kohn, and its development links first with Karl W. Deutsch, and later with Miroslav Hroch, Ernest Gellner, and a group of their followers in the eighties (Eric Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1993), p. 8.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction", in: *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm, (Cambridge, Cambridge UP: 1994), p. 9.

backward, primitive and thus necessarily brought under some special disciplinary rule of control and punishment until they reach the level of self-controlled and progressive communities.

I do not claim that these kind of differences are useless, as they are used everywhere and have been in all eras, from “barbarian” and “Greek”, to “Christian” and “pagan” onwards⁴ but it is certain that they cannot be defended on the grounds of new theories of nation, because they give us, as in Hegel’s terminology, two kinds of nations. They were constructed, speaking metaphorically, as Volk theory against People theories.⁴ Both kind of theories had to answer the question of where the power of the community resides, to find the location of the overwhelming and radiating unique power which gives shape and presence to these all-embracing unities of human social life. Their logic was different and can show us where and how the above differentiation between natural and artificial, or premodern and modern, has been articulated. For that purpose we can take the examples of *The Federalist Papers* and of Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of the Mankind*.

The Federalist Papers were the first effective marriage of representation and democracy. Where is the centre of all political power in such a system? In *the people*, the Papers declared, and they had in mind a community of individualized members, and this community of men gives decision-making power to their representatives. In his first text on nations and nationalisms in 1972, Eric Hobsbawm confirmed the difference between people and nation in case of the U.S.A.: “*Americanism*, whatever its present political connotation, was originally a universal programme as well as a definition of what the citizen of the USA ought to represent: an invitation to all men to become Americans if they so chose, as well as an ideal description of those who already were. This has not prevented it from turning into a strongly nationalist slogan.”⁶ In spite of all the other changing ideas about nation, here we have, beside the already mentioned distinction between *natural* or *real*, and *artificial* communities, another distinction which has as a consequence a dichotomy between those

⁴ It is interesting that Greeks, when introduced to Christianity, were called Christians, while those who were not were called Greeks (see, for instance, documents of the seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea from 787, in Daniel J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 59 ff.).

⁵ “People” in English and “Volk” in German should have approximately the same field of signification, and they had at first, but today the usual translation of “Volk” in English is “Nation”.

⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, “Some Reflections on Nationalism”, in: *Essays in Memory of Peter Nettl: Imagination and Precision in the Social Sciences* (London: Faber&Faber, 1972), p. 395.

Nation-States which were built on an ideology of *People*, and those which were a product of ideologies founded on *nation* and *Volk* ideology. If we say that this difference is undoubtedly real, and connect *People* as a principle with the revolutions of democratic first-comers (England, USA and France), while the *Volk*-principle is more obvious for those who developed their Nation-States later, there is still something problematic about the idea of people being a “universal programme”. First, it might be “universal” in 1972 to mention “invitation to all men”, but today we all feel the need to add immediately that women (and for that matter, children) were excluded. But they were not the only exclusion, and beside Native Americans there were black slaves, ancestors of the African Americans of today, even in Jefferson’s own house.⁷

In Herder’s work we find the idea of the human community as an organic structure growing into an indivisible entity by human mutual responsibility for each other, and here we find the above mentioned mediaeval concept of *corpus mysticum* in a secular form. The responsibility, namely, is not just between existing members of the community, but to those long gone as well – in the form of responsibility for tradition. It has to be a responsibility to those who will arrive in the future as well, because today’s membership in an organic community means building the tradition for tomorrow. This is what *Volk* is about: the community of dead, alive and members yet unborn. In essence, the difference between *people* and *Volk* theories of the nation is not embedded in the universal humanism of the former and particular nationalism of the latter. We can hardly find that kind of nationalism in Herder anyway. The difference lies in the structural idea about the society, and in the *Leitmotiv* linking the members of respective communities together. In the first case, and in its radical formulations (USA republicanism is not that radical and it is much more similar to Herder’s ideas than is usually admitted) society is just a sum of individuals. They are linked together by interests which enable a kind of mutual agreement to respect law and order for the benefit of all. In the second case, society is the basic unity or corpus, and individuals are the members of this corpus, linked together by the eternal responsibility for maintaining this unity – the real existing subject of progressive or redemptive history.

There is nothing universal about Nation-State, be it founded on the people concept or on the *Volk* concept. Any kind of state is based on some kind of

⁷ It is now well known that he not only have slaves, but also had sexual relations with a slave who gave birth to his child. Americans were so appalled by such allegations that a complete medical re-examination had been necessary to prove beyond any doubt (O.K., beyond 96% doubt) that Jefferson was the father.

exclusion and limitation. The difference between people and nation is not, of course, the difference between natural and artificial, but it is not a difference between “universal” and “limited” approach either. They are different ways of producing limitations.

2 *Even art is not what it used to be*

Art and its theory have experienced a similar cultural turn as theories of nation did. But it does not mean that conceptual developments were simultaneous. That is precisely the reason why postmodernism got its first legitimization from art theories, as there were already existing grounds for the criticism and negation of modernity.

Peter Bürger⁸ defined the historical avant-gardes that contested the concept of art as movements of “bringing the arts back into life”. Their direct opponent was estheticism, the final stage of the installment of the “Institution Kunst” as special bourgeois and capitalist formation. The avant-garde attack on the institution failed, avant-garde thus became historical, and its anti-art was included into the artistic institutions of the capitalist society.

On the other hand, especially in the States, this historical dimension of avant-garde vs. modern art and its failure did not get much attention, and was embraced in terms of broader concept of modernism.⁹ The main preoccupation was to find a definition of art which would not embarrass the definer at the first reversal in the arts, as happened to Clement Greenberg. That meant that it would have to satisfy Weitz’s notion of art as an “open concept”, but step over his claim that making definitions of art is in itself a fruitless endeavour. The institutional theory of art gives us the crucial definitions of the territory where its prerogatives, procedures and legislation have to be obeyed: “A work of art is an artifact of a kind created to be presented to an artworld public”.¹⁰ Here, the definition of the artworld as the totality of

⁸ Peter Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974)

⁹ The central figure here is Clement Greenberg, and his “Modernist Painting” from 1960 is often mentioned as the best example (see Clement Greenberg, *The Collected Essays and Criticism Vol. 4 – Modernism With a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. by John O’Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁰ George Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics. An Analytic Approach* (New York – Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997), p. 92 (with additional definitions: “An artist is a person who participates with understanding in the making of a work of art. A public is a set of persons the members of which are prepared in some degree to understand an object which is presented to them. The artworld is the totality of all artworld systems. An artworld system is a framework for the presentation of a work of art by an artist to an artworld public.”; *ibid.*, p. 92.).

all artworld systems might ring a bell: it is an astonishing parallel to the modernist idea of the world order as a totality of Nation-States entering as individuals into the inter-national system. Dickie's theory of artworlds is a similar theory of a world system of artistic Nation-States.

This kind of theory, a theory of Art-States and their procedures, is quite conservative really. To preserve art as a certain definable sector, against attacks from new-born artworks and art-theories, the theory is ready to forget art's historical mission and eternal values, but not the institutional procedural character of the artistic order. Instead, it insists on the institutional framework and a certain procedure. Starting with Duchamp and Warhol it arrived at discussions about gorilla and chimpanzee art¹¹. Whatever the outcome of these discussions, this kind of theory is ready to embrace relativism just to preserve established procedural rules governing the artworld. That is what makes it a State – it is a safe haven from the natural state of a war of everybody against everybody else. Beside that, it is worth mentioning that it describes contemporary post-modern artistic activity in terms of folk-art. In folk-art, it is not the anonymity of creation which makes it something collective, but its institutional collective “censorship” which forgets all about artworks which were not accepted, or omits unacceptable parts from otherwise accepted artworks. Taking the institutional theory of contemporary art seriously, we would say that the problem is not in recognizing artworks as artworks, but in what is worth remembering at all. To be recognized as an artist, or that your works are recognized as artworks, does not mean much. In our world, there are more artists spread around us than Brillo Boxes available. So, it is more important to get noticed at all, than to be recognized as producer of artworks, and even more important to be remembered for anything at all. Mass and industrial production of artworks have made us unable to see the line which provides an autonomous artistic territory inside the empire of culture, and thus have put all art, highbrow and lowbrow, elite and mass together into something institutionally quite similar to the functioning of folk-art.¹²

If we are allowed to proceed to conclusions, *nation* is now an artificial product of artists and intellectuals, its ultimate goal is *nation state* as a sovereign body which includes *Institution Kunst* as one of its artificial constructive pillars. Art, on the other hand, is a multiplicity of artworlds, organized in respective institutions which obey certain rules of procedure for an artwork to achieve

¹¹ George Dickie, *ibid.*, p. 85; see also the discussion between George Dickie and Arthur Danto in *Danto and his Critics*, ed. Mark Rollins (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

¹² This feature brought up an interesting insight in contemporary folk studies. See Michael Owen Jones, *Exploring Folk-Art: Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work, and Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor/ London: UMI, 1987), and other works of (post)modern folk studies.

status. Avant-garde art attacked the institution but failed, institutions won the battle, but the price is that there are no criteria left beside an empty institutional gesture.

3 *Slovenia and Africa*

Slovenia is not “haunted” by its history but by its lack of it, and no kind of idealised or diminishing image in the eyes of the West presents the real problem. The problem is the lack of any identity at all. This absence in eyes of the beholder is well evidenced if we read the diaries and other texts of foreign travellers. It seems that they crossed directly from the “West” to the “Orient”, or to the “East”, without any perception of this “in-between” Slovenian passage. This absence in time and space is what haunted the Slovenian national movement, and presents a problem even today. Whatever is tried to present and represent Slovenia as a special and different entity seems to fail. It has a name, but it gets mixed up with Slovakia and Slavonia. It has a flag, but it gets mixed with a Russian flag, and these red-blue-white flags are all so similar anyway. It would like to be seen as the first bastion of the West on its far East frontiers, but it is usually invisible, like a midland with no identity, or recognized as Ex-Yugoslav post-communist Balkan country in transition (what a disaster of mapping!). It is a case worth comparing to Dickie’s plumber walking over the artwork without noticing that it is one.¹³ In the case of Slovenia, this “being-walked-over-unrecognized” feeling is all over the territory, and all over its history.

We have no time to deal with the long history of our dream nation. What we can do here is just get a glimpse on one of the moments of this “longue durée” history of cultural building and fighting. The moment is after 1848 when Austria emerged from its “Bach phase” of surveillance and repression against “Nationalists” and “Liberals”. The atmosphere, with still restrained democracy and with unfriendly German nationalism more or less endangering all the others, softened enough to allow for some political activity. The Slovenian cultural scene has divided itself into two bitterly opposed camps, conservatives and liberals. There were still no political parties, so these two camps fought cultural battles. In the middle of these battles was Fran Levstik, a liberal who introduced the demand for “realism” into Slovenian literature, and defined his realism as a kind of literature which would enable “Slovenian to recognize Slovenian as in a mirror”. This formula tells very well what had

¹³ George Dickie, *Aesthetics: An Introduction*, (Indianapolis : Pegasus, 1971), p. 99.

been the aim – the artistic representation of the Slovenian nation which would organize Slovenians into a nation. The addressee of literature, and its real hero, should be the Slovenian people, the rural population who spoke the untainted language and needed just a bit of nationalist encouragement to strengthen their Slovenian roots into an unbeatable national fortress against the Germanization which attacked the towns and cities. The literary reality of this style was what they call in national literary science “romantic realism”, but Levstik’s problem was that, himself a more or less romantic poet, he could not be satisfied with what the Slovenian prose of that time had to offer. His friend Josip Jurčič misunderstood him and went onto describe “ordinary rural people” in a manner which introduced weird marginal characters from the country pub into an otherwise romantic love story, like putting three or four Falstaffs faltering through Romeo-and-Juliet tragedy. So, as is the usual outcome, Levstik himself had to show what a proper Slovenian national mirroring narrative should be. “Martin Krpan” was his answer, written in a “demotic” proposal for a national literary language and style, and telling a story which has remained a must of all curricular introductions into Slovenian literature until present times. And here it is.

Habsburg Empire is, once again, in danger. A mighty Turk called Brdavs arrives in Vienna and challenges the Emperor’s best fighters, killing them one after another. When all hope is lost, somebody brings up the name of Martin Krpan, a simple Slovenian well known to the Emperor’s customs officials, tax collectors and policemen, because he has been evading paying his duties and survives by smuggling salt, while giving a beating to the Empire’s officials even when they totally outnumber him. A culturally unspoiled man from the “demos”, a self-made man, he was a Christian (Levstik tells us that his home is on St. Trinity Hill) and thus he obeys, if reluctantly, the Emperor’s request to come and help. In Vienna, they try to make a real knight of him, but he destroys all the armour, and declines all the best horses from the Emperor’s stable. Instead of this he chooses a tree which the Empress liked the most for her afternoon shadow-napping, and makes himself a weapon from it. He goes into battle with his mule, a Slovenian version of Don Quichote’s Rosinante, and, unlike the Spanish knight, wins the fight and beheads the Turk in a matter-of-fact manner, without any hate and with compassion, as a real Christian. After this triumph on the streets of Vienna, his victory becomes a problem and embarrassment. The Emperor’s prime minister suspects that Krpan will want a reward in political terms, may be even his job, while the Empress hates him because he is so simple and because he deconstructed her shadow. The Emperor is a good man, but he cannot fight against governmental intrigues and his own wife, and Krpan stays in

Vienna because, afraid of his strength and popularity, they do not know how to get rid of him. Finally, when asked what he would like as a reward, Krpan answers that the best reward would be to let him go home, as he is already homesick, but if the Emperor wants to give him something of use, let it be a permit which would give Krpan the permanent right to smuggle. It is not that it presents a real problem, but beating the Emperor's officials on an everyday basis is in itself an unnecessary nuisance.

Obviously, Martin Krpan represents the Nation in a situation when art is an Ideological Apparatus of the Invisible Slovenian State. In him, we find a simple and unspoiled barbarian who is capable of taking care of himself, and his natural wit belittles all modern ways of great Empire. He has a culture of his own, living on the margins of Order as a smuggler. Order has no power over him. However, as a good Christian he is also a good and obeying Subject. His humorous contempt for the Emperor, who cannot reign his own Empire, and for the Empress and ministers who dominate his will with their private interests, and his physical force and symbolic power over them – all that makes us think about Hašek's Švejk on one side, and about Micić's Zenitist Balkan Barbarogenious on the other. His political sting is obvious, but not dangerous: leave me alone to my ways, as that will hurt no one. When you need me as the last resort against the Others, just call me, for I know how degenerate and helpless you are, and feel pity for you. You need me on the frontiers, and the payment I want is not democracy or independence, it is being left alone to my small businesses on the margins of the Order. If you do not touch me, I will make myself invisible.

That is, of course, quite a conservative program for a liberal, but you should view the images of the national from the conservative side. Even in its anti-modernist disguise, this demophillia turned into something quite different without any problem just a generation after Levstik, when Ivan Cankar, the writer of *fin-de-siècle* modernism, announced that the Slovenian Nation was a Proletarian Nation. By that he did not mean that we have numerous families, and not only that we are in the position of a slave-nation. The proletarian position is one of universal insight, and of universal redemption. In Martin Krpan story the big dreams of a small nation are hidden, to be revealed just a historical moment later.

Africa might make for an interesting appendix. To understand the African situation of today when it is depicted as a "black hole" on the globe, and as a narrative of unending massacres between primitive tribes and cannibalistic politicians, we have to formulate the problem of African identity on the background of its historical roots in colonialism. Here is the beginning of Mamdani's book *Citizen and Subject*:

“Discussions on Africa’s present predicament revolve around two clear tendencies: modernist and communitarian... The liberal solution is to locate politics in civil society, and the African solution is to put Africa’s age old communities at the centre of African politics. One side calls for a regime that will champion rights, and the other stands in defence of culture. The impasse in Africa is not only at the level of practical politics. It is also a paralysis of perspective.”¹⁴ You could without problem put any possible country in place of Africa here. This paralysis of perspective, and confrontation between modernism and communitarianism, is the national dilemma of the post-modern, or post-industrial, or global (whatever label you like most) condition. Art is still involved in these confrontations, on both ideological sides; the problem is that there is a feeling of forgery on both sides as well. It is not that just the “Eurocentric” side is “imported”, the same goes for “the Native” and “African” side as well. They are both artificial, products of colonialism, or, if you prefer, the state of modernity. The colonialist/native question has been reformulated into an African national question, but the relation between Eurocentrism and Africanism, between modernisation and communitarianism is still the relation of the daily African journey. Confronted with a bad image of Africa, Africans may themselves say sometimes that this is just the childhood of new nations. If they don’t say it, we say it for new-born nation-states of the Balkans.

4 Conclusion

Let us begin the conclusion with some remarks on the introduction of the “artificial” character of nation. If confronted with the previous theories of nation as a “natural” community, it is a very reasonable move. But, when combined with the differentiation between “artificial” and “real” communities, it becomes confused and suspect. The reason for suspicion is the obvious use of such differentiation to prevent new nations from building their artificial communities: “In all these views I believe, there is a marked (and, in my opinion, ahistorical) discomfort with non-western societies acquiring national independence, which is believed to be ‘foreign’ to their ethos. Hence the repeated insistence on the Western provenance of nationalist philosophies that are therefore ill-suited to, and likely to be abused by Arabs, Zulus,

¹⁴ Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Kampala – Cape Town – London: Fountain Publishers/David Phillip Publishers/ James Currey Ltd., 1996), p. 3.

Indonesian, Irish, or Jamaicans.”¹⁵ We have quite a political situation here, and to deal with it correctly, we will say that Edward Said is on the right side against these kind of remarks as much as “artificial” theory of nation is on the right side against “natural” one.

Still, there is something wrong here, and if we leave political problems aside, what is wrong is the vocabulary. In discourses on nation and new nations, we have constantly, after the “natural” background of nation has been dropped out, found the conceptual pair of artificial against real, and invention as a method. But we know that the correct pairs are natural vs. artificial, and fictitious vs. real. If nations are not natural but artificial, it does not mean that they are not real. Fictions have no existence, but artificial things are quite real. And today it is hard to tell sometimes what is the difference. To make something artificial out of something natural, you need invention and/or discovery. To make something fictitious real, you need production. That artists and intellectuals invented nation sounds agreeable in the post-modern condition, but it is not true. Intellectuals and artists have been very busy “naturalizing” their respective nations, and thus making their artificial character invisible, but they did not invent nations. Artists and intellectuals were involved in the production of this fiction. With latecomers to modernization, this involvement became even more necessary. Their involvement is quite understandable. To produce an artificial real mechanism by putting together natural and fictitious parts it takes scientific and artistic technique/*techné*. Theories which suggest that we could get rid of nations if artists and intellectuals would stop inventing them, or theories which offer a possible easy deconstruction of nations because they are artificial constructions anyway, and theories which involve the categorization of nations into the camps of real and artificial ones – all these theories are not just politically incorrect. They are theoretically incorrect.

With this correction of theories of nation we will now move to art. Artists have not invented the nation, but they did naturalize its artificial existence, and produce its real presence from fictitious, artificial and natural parts. What might be of interest is not the “historical responsibility” of artists and intellectuals for producing such a monster, or their glorious authorship in producing such a heroic soul of world redemptive projects. What is so special in art that it has to be involved in naturalizing and productive social processes?

The answer most cherished by our discipline is – the aesthetic. Already in Baumgarten it has a special position. With Kant’s criticism, aesthetic achieved the honorary position which it, more or less, still holds today, albeit in an

¹⁵ Edward W. Said, *Cultural Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 261.

indebted and mortgaged empire: “The powerful interest that governs the third *Critique* is lodged in the image of the gap, gulf, or separation of realms that divides our interests in the world of appearances (nature) from our interest in achieving existence in a ‘realm of ends’.”¹⁶ There is a gap to be bridged, and through the transcending of this gap, we do not arrive just to a safe passage from one side to the other. We produce “the whole” literally – over the hole. Our secular world, as Lacanians could well explain us, is not built on a rock, but on a void.

Identification between art and aesthetic function has been nearly complete, even if Kant did not leave any rules which would point in that direction. The representational form of mimetic art has been the best means for naturalizing artificial communities, and for producing real ones from natural and fictitious materials. The Prague School was the first one to point to the aesthetic function as the function present in all discourses and languages and not just in art, while on the other hand it underlined that artwork is a discourse in which aesthetic functions dominate, organizing all the other functions around it. And aesthetic functions as a kind of turn which instead of using language as the means of communication turns our attention to the means of communication themselves.

Today, even this seems to be saying too much. There is still art which has the aesthetic function as a dominant one. But, “Does the aesthetic definition of art ... supply a sufficient condition for art? No, and for reasons with which we are already very familiar. Many non-artworks are intended to have the capacity to promote the kind of attention and contemplation that the aesthetic definition of art ascribe to all and only artworks.”¹⁷ This is the first change, well known through the theorizing, for instance, of Wolfgang Iser – the whole world is full of aesthetic, it is an aestheticized world, and as art has lost its primacy in the representational-mimetic function, it is losing the battle for its instalment as the prevailing producer of aesthetic affects. On the other hand, “There is a popular tendency to use the notion of aesthetic experience as a synonym for experiencing art in general ... Undeniably, these responses are among the most important experiences to be derived from artworks in general. However, they are not the only ones, nor the only legitimate ones, nor are they even the most important ones with respect to every single artwork.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Anthony J. Cascardi, *Consequences of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 82.

¹⁷ Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Art. A Contemporary Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 179-180.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

It is not art as such that is involved in nation-making but the aesthetic possibility to represent, to bridge and to universalize on a territory without any certain grounds and limits, across the gap. To cross a gap which frightens you, you have to turn your attention to the things above and forget about the abyss down there. This shift of the attention is what the aesthetic function does. Art, especially in the nineteenth century, has been the main means of producing these aesthetic effects. Today, its sublime and missionary role is over, and the dominant position of the aesthetic function in artworks might be over too. In any case, there are already artworks which have no aesthetic function at all, and there are artworks which have other dominant functions. Both might be new in the Western culture of modernity, but are nothing special if discussed in the framework of different historical or contemporary cultures and positions that art and artworks occupied and occupy in them.

The coincidence of globalization, which is just the final outcome of nation-making movements, or, better stated, of two Western inventions (the centralized sovereign nation-state and the international system of states) become universal, with global aestheticization, very probably means that this new global world is not without its gaps, and is in that way not so very different from the nineteenth century. The need to forget about the abyss with the help of an aesthetic shift of attention might be even greater. Global aestheticization is a certain sign of existing gaps which have to be transcended, and a certain sign of a global which given its lack of universality has to (re)produce itself using aesthetic naturalization and production. Which means, if we phrase it along the lines of Kant and Cascardi, that our global world at least has some of the “constitutive opacity”.¹⁹ What such an opacity needs is Kant’s kind of rigorous criticism which, among other things, would show that “art cannot unify but can at best render possible a transition between them [i.e., the ‘two worlds’ bridged into a ‘whole’ one]”.²⁰ And if art is no longer the main constructor of bridges (and it certainly was not for Kant) any more, and as we care about art more then we care about the global world, otherwise we would not be aestheticians – what is the fate of art, and its noble function?

Well, while to produce some pleasure, fun and even just peaceful leisure time might not be an endeavour to unworthy for the lofty status of art, there is still another possibility which is already at work, invented by avant-garde art. Jean-François Lyotard has found it in Marcel Duchamp’s *Given*: “This uncommentable thing has nothing mystical about it: it’s simply the

¹⁹ Anthony Cascardi, op. cit., p. 91.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

incommensurable brought back into commentary. Commentary will perforce be incongruent with the work.”²¹

With this possible function, art is distinguishable and very well distinguished from other ways of culture. And that kind of effect or function, working in reverse compared with art’s productive and affirmative function, will become very important, even politically important, if our feelings and predictions about globalization are correct. While the art well embedded into cultural context, alike to a nation, tells us to proceed without losing sight of far-away horizons of progress, the other kind of art, distancing itself from the seemingly productive endeavours of building the whole on the bridge over the abyss, is producing signposts diverting our gaze to the ground: “Mind the gap!”

²¹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Duchamp's TRANS/formers* (California: Venice Lapis Press, 1990), p. 11.