Life in Amplitude: Pathos, Passion and Thinking on Art and Aesthetics in Occupied Prague (1939–1945)*

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SYNOPSIS
The study is largely concerned with the topic of *pathos*, *affect* and the *pathic quality* in Czech thinking about art and aesthetics in the first half of the 1940s. Consideration of *pathos* is here, at the same time, a reconstruction of the relationship between aesthetic and art-historical thinking about art, a reconstruction of the affective/emotional experiencing of art and the attitude to aesthetics/ethics in occupied Prague during the war years, and of the pathos of *resistance* to violence even at the cost of suffering and sacrifice, as represented by the art historians and theorists Růžena Vacková (1901–1982) and Pavel Kropáček (1915–1943). The study sets out from the idea of the existence of a relationship between suffering and activity, practice and pathos, *passivity* and *passion* as active forces underpinning both actions and the making of art. The Second World War constitutes a highly specific cultural and social, mental, but also emotional and affective, 'space' in which man was faced with extreme states and experiences that were articulated in art in a variety of modes of depiction, but also duly reflected in the theory and philosophy of art. Here reflexions of *pathos*, *monumentality* and *nobility* come to the fore as aesthetic (or esthetico-psychological and philosophical) categories in the theory of art, along with a *pathic* history of art and *pathic* modus vivendi of not just artists, but also art theorists, and pathos as the icono-pathic force of works of art in general.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA / KEYWORDS
Patos; umělecko-estetické myšlení; okupace 1939–1945; Růžena Vacková; Paul Ludwig Landsberg; Pavel Kropáček / pathos; artistic-aesthetic thinking; occupation 1939–1945; Růžena Vacková; Paul Ludwig Landsberg; Pavel Kropáček.

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> In amplitude, man is exposed to extreme possibilities, which to ordinary life are mere abstract, remote possibilities, and he protests against those that are ordinary and matter-of-course. […] Everyday awareness is affected by

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> existence in amplitude often through an impression of an unnatural state, infirmity or convulsion in which the 'healthy', 'normal' individual cannot endure… Holding out in this position, actually putting oneself through it, is an odd, barely comprehensible thing to do…
> Jan Patočka: *Life in Balance, Life in Amplitude* (2004, p. 59–60)

> It remains to bring out the truth of the course: the desire that is its origin and that it stages. The course exists because there is a desire for Neutral: a *pathos* (a patho-logy?).
> Roland Barthes: *The Neutral* (2005, p. 12)

In 1948 Růžena Vacková (1901–1982), Professor of Classical Archaeology and the History of Ancient Culture at Charles University in Prague, published her chef-d'œuvre in the theory of art: *Výtvarný projev v dramatickém umění* (The Visual Aspect of Dramatic Art). The book arose out of the unsettling, dramatic and, for the author, painful events of which she writes in the dedication:

> *I dedicate this book to those who were uppermost in my mind as I wrote it and who paid their patriotic dues with their lives: my mother Mrs Růžena Vacková, my brother Dozent MUDr. Vladimír Vacek, my brother-in-law Prof. MUDr. Aleksandar Gjurič and his friend who was executed alongside them, Dozent MUDr. František Procházka. This is a cross to go with a grave that lies abroad, beside the German prison in Dresden* (Vacková 1948, p. 5).

In January 1945 Růžena Vacková was herself arrested by the Gestapo, charged with using a transmitter to send secret messages to London, and condemned to death. She was saved from her cell on death row by the events of May 1945 and the end of the war.

At the time when Vacková was writing her book about Prague under the Occupation, the twenty-seven-year-old art historian Pavel Kropáček (1915–1943) was dying at Auschwitz. He had joined the anti-Nazi resistance, been arrested in April 1942 and, following particularly brutal interrogation by the Gestapo, deported to Auschwitz in January 1943, there to be tortured to death a few weeks later.

What links these two historians and theorists of art, who both in their treatises on art theory and in their critical essays of the late 1930s and during the wartime Occupation of the Czech Lands by Nazi Germany return constantly and with particular urgency to the issue of pathos and monumentality? It is *passio* in both senses of the word: passion and suffering. Not only the art-theoretical thinking of Pavel Kropáček and Růžena Vacková, but also their own pathic existence, their theorising about pathos and pathic representation in works of art and in the making of art. In other words, the inter-relation between creating/doing (*poiein*) and suffering (*paschein*), between passive (theoretical) thinking about the *pathos* (in and) of art and (practical-)active personal conduct, even at the cost of suffering and self-sacrifice.

Faced with the sheer brutality of the war years, the creators and historians of the art issuing from the Protectorate of 'Böhmen und Mähren' and 'life in amplitude'

contemplate it as a protest 'against all excessively human illusions, against the naïve paradises of shrinking "harmonious" souls, against those dreams of life in a calm, trouble-free rut of employment, work, everyday obligations, being useful, harmony and happiness' (Patočka 2004, p. 60) seeing in it a problem of man 'dispossessed of his humanity', as Pavel Kropáček writes in *Lidské automaty v umění* (Human Automata in Art, 1941–1942, p. 209). This line of thought leads to the idea of a 'new' humanity, monumentality and the 'soulful heroism' (Kropáček 2002–2003) of those who pass through a catharsis of *pathos*. For a catharsis to have its cleansing effect, there has to be a high degree of affectivity: being 'infected', seized or stricken by a force that disturbs, wounds and in extreme cases even destroys, a force that transcends 'life in equilibrium', elevating it to 'life in amplitude'.

The period when these 'life stories'[1] dramatically gain momentum, the 1940s, is one that demanded extreme commitment and a kind of paradoxical determination to bear another's burden and the violence done them and at the same time to resist that burden and violence. The Occupation, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the Second World War constitute a cultural and social, mental, but also emotional and affective 'space' in which man was faced with extreme states and experiences that were articulated in art in a variety of modes of depiction, but were also duly reflected in the theory and philosophy of art.

Yet how is it to be explained that at a time of war, foreign occupation and sheer brutality the subject of pathos and monumentality becomes one of the main themes in the discourse of art and aesthetics, and of the visual arts and literature themselves? How is it to be explained that in the face of inhumanity, cruelty and suffering works emerged with a decidedly aesthetic impact? How is it possible to depict the unimaginable? In this connection a consistent distinction has to be drawn between war and violence as the subject of tragedy (from Ancient Greece on) and actual war, between the aesthetics of horror and dread in works of art and the horror evoked by actual events. In addition, there can be no assumption that art could ever intend, or have the capacity, to rise to a degree of realism amounting to the photographic reproduction of reality in all its drasticality. The fact that countless works from the two twentieth-century world wars alone render the horror, inhumanity, cruelty and brutality that accompanied them with unprecedented intensity, without their creators having even been first-hand witnesses to it all, may serve as exemplary evidence of the power of aesthetic rendition.

What kind of stories tell — and in what kind of language — of shocking turns of events, sudden, fateful transformations in life situations, traumatic and traumatising experiences and events in their incomprehensible suddenness? What kind of stories of pathic affliction, the dimensions of which are fundamentally different from the

1 The 'life story' (*Lebensgeschichte*) as a concept central to Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutics of life contains the momentous factor of personal identity, which is unutterable, which can be 'narrated' (only) against the horizon of human time, as Dilthey speculates in the context of autobiographies, seen as the most direct expression of the reflexion of life and the 'explication of life in its mysterious alliance of chance, fate and character' (Dilthey 1965, p. 74). The concept of 'life story' is twofold, as we also see it interpreted in a vast and philosophically broad-based work by László Tengelyi (1998), the duality being exposed in the very combination of 'life' and 'story', 'life' and 'experience'.

practical and epistemic sphere? In this context, Bernhard Waldenfels asks whether the suffering and violence to which man is exposed and which he must suffer passively, can be narrated in the same way as positive actions connected — even despite unfavourable circumstances — with decision-making, planning and doing. And can war be told of as an explosion of collective violence and the associated persecution and terror, that is to say, stories of victims, passive and active participants, givers and takers of orders, victors and vanquished (Waldenfels 2002b, p. 28)? These stories and the events in them contain gaps and 'holes of non-sense', which gape open in the narrative: 'silence that resides not in *something*'s not being said or done, something's being glossed over or left out, but in the fact that the very sense of an event eludes any verbal or practical grip on it' (ibid., p. 32). According to Waldenfels, the un-narratable features as a kind of figure of something 'extra-ordinary', something that defies all order, including ordered narration, and in this connection he advances the important idea that precisely that which eludes narration, the caesuras, cracks, syncopes, is where ethical aspects and expectations are revealed. He is at pains to point out that what defies narration is not a contradiction of what can be narrated, but its reverse side (ibid., p. 21).

One might hazard the thesis that it was primarily the pathos of the affective impact on 'pathic flesh', the physicality of emotions, that affords access to the reality of 'one's self' and the 'other': pathos as something that *befalls* one, as when an event suddenly enters one's life as an extraneous element. These range from stirrings of the emotions, and the affects arising, to first-hand experience of violence, pain or even physical destruction: violence of the kind to which, during the years of war and foreign occupation, each and every Czech was potentially exposed as part of the national collectivity, doomed by occupation and the Protectorate to inert passivity. However, this was a passivity that was at once affectivity and, in its very non-intentionality, pathos of such an extreme order that the abrupt, if passive condition of being cast upon oneself — in terms of Michel Henry's '*phénoménologie radicale de la vie*' (Henry 1996, pp. 182, 280) — at the same time brought out the 'something left over', manifested as a special energy and activity aimed at resistance to this alien intrusion.

PASSIVITY, PASSIO, PATHOS: THE RETURN OF AN EXCOMMUNICATED CATEGORY

Against the background of the dramatic events of 1939, the philosopher Jan Patočka attempted, in the essay *Life in Balance, Life in Amplitude* (*Životní rovnováha a životní amplituda*), to interpret pathos and the pathic mode of being. Not only does Patočka place the pathic 'life in amplitude' in direct opposition to all that is sober and mundane about everyday life and that desires nothing but a 'guarantee of its self, a guarantee of a happy outcome, a guarantee of the sensible and practical purposefulness of existence' (Patočka 2004, pp. 57–58), he also names one of the basic aspects of pathos, '[its intolerance] of the ideas of reason, which pursues its own interests' (Waldenfels 2010, p. 126).[2] Life in amplitude is an attempt to step beyond objectivity and eternity

2 After the war, Weizsäcker's pathisophy was based on the notion of 'antilogicality' (Viktor von Weizsäcker: *Pathosophie*, 1956).

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via the medium of self-realisation in the face of extreme eventualities: 'Living in amplitude amounts to a *test* of oneself and a *protest*' (Patočka 2004, p. 59).

Patočka stresses the pain to which man 'in amplitude' is exposed as the basic dimension of pathic existence:

> *On the other hand, pain as caught and borne in amplitude teaches us how to discover the world and shows us that we are free in how we interpret its sense. Pain casts, or may cast, us into that dimension that is not closed to us, the dimension of our own depth that cannot be stolen from us. For this revelation of an inner, altered light it is possible even to love a pain that is many times greater and more profound than intoxication with power and success. The essence of humanity is not to feel oneself (ful)filled with things that are finite. Yet power, success and 'worldly' greatness are all finite. Coarse souls may speak of mental substitutes for worldly successes, the world's sour grapes. But one who has been transformed by pain, will never hanker — unless he sinks to a quite different plane — after vulgar wellbeing and the tough power of the day* (ibid., p. 61).

Jan Patočka addresses an idea developed at the end of the twentieth century by Michel Henry in his 'radical phenomenology of life', the pathic immediacy of life in the sense of an affective self-proving (*épreuve*) that is at the same time pure 'suffering' (*souffrance*), since every life is a *passion*, though that remains associated with what Henry calls 'radical passivity' — the experience of being fundamentally and irrevocably cast upon oneself, equated to the specific powerlessness to act as I do. This radical passivity of pathos, which Henry takes as the essence of our subjectivity, also underpins the extraordinary power of freedom.[3]

Suffering arises from the innermost possibilities of life itself, it is part of a process in which life is realised quite extraordinarily as self-experiencing and self-enduring, and this state has its own particular activity and ways of acting. This aspect of pathos, its paradoxical nature as activity of passivity, should also not be lost sight of: in some situations pathos presents itself at the very moment when the subject is powerless to act, having been deprived of that option. On the one hand, one experiences the indubitability of one's 'I am', what Husserl calls the 'intentional proto-foundation of my world' and the 'primal reality that I have to endure' (Husserl 1974, p. 244). With this kind of experience of violence, the subject is driven to extreme passivity and, thereby, to the essence of its own self. Yet at the same time the opportunity for another kind of experience is opened up: that of being taken over symbolically, of being 'displaced' by the sublimating imagination, so that the experience can have opened up to it, at least *via negationis*, a certain horizon of sense (Staudigl 2006, p. 306). This

3 In his lectures on analysing passive synthesis (a concept originally connected with his 'phenomenology of association') as a specific form of how the consciousness works, Husserl says that 'already present in passivity is everything that enables the active Self to perform'. If the Self lived only actively, 'it would not need to carry out any activity of cognition', it would remain 'blind' to 'automatic cognition'. Passivity is understood by Husserl not as 'receptiveness', but as a special kind of activity of the consciousness that proceeds 'automatically' (Husserl 1966, pp. 209, 235).

would be the circumstance in March 1939, when foreign occupation and the Protectorate deprived the (Czech) national community, precisely *as* a community, of any capacity to do anything, thus 'condemning' it to *passivity*, *passio* and *pathos*,[4] and this passivity of pathos at once became the basis of and springboard for activity (resistance) and doing things. However, intrinsic to this passivity, as the 'medium of inner being', is freedom, which remains freedom even in its passivity, and passivity is simultaneously the medium of freedom (Forthomme 1995, p. 48).

Pathos, as Bernhard Waldenfels writes, does not assail us as something that we intend, understand, contemplate, deflect or welcome, but a time-space continuum out of which we respond to that by which we are stricken. An attack of pathos, which is not exhausted through pathetic gestures, affects us as 'a never entirely evaluable surplus that may be described as pointless or aimless, insofar as it severs networks of meaning, disrupts regularity and thereby decontextualises an event' (Waldenfels 2006, p. 50–51). In order to be able to thematise such attacks of pathos, we need what Waldenfels calls the 'responsive epoché', by means of which all relevant statements that have validity, sense, coherence and follow certain rules, are related retroactively to that to which they had (originally) been responding: to things that happen to us and force us to give responses.

So here pathos is understood also as a response to violence as experienced personally and collectively within a community exposed to it, violence that is 'a foreign body that tears at the existing fabric of sense' (Waldenfels 2006, p. 52–53). The experiencing of this 'foreign body' through pain, upheavals, traumas, shock and even seizure is a pathic experience associated with the violence that Bernhard Waldenfels defines as the 'harm done to the claims advanced by a being capable of relating itself to itself' (Waldenfels 1990, p. 115). Violence in every shape and form causes an affection that means having an experience of one's own passivity and alienness. Mainly it affects the body and the physical, though not even this kind of violence can render a response impossible; it cannot stop one saying 'I can'. And in this power also resides the opportunity equally to act or to remain inactive, *actio* and *passio*, since within every potential there is, according to Aristotle, both *passion* ('paschein') and passivity. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle — discussing the various parts of the action in a tragedy — describes pathos as suffering: 'We have spoken previously of peripeteia and discovery, suffering is then action that wreaks destruction or gives rise to pain, such as a killing before the audience's eyes, excessive suffering, trauma etc.' [1452b, 10].

According to Waldenfels, pathos is

> *experience itself in the form of an event. Everything with which we are stricken and which affects us moves* on the boundaries of good and bad, right and wrong, yes and no. *Anyone who is suddenly struck by the flash of an idea, an unexpected gift, an injury as by a light-ray or needle, has come too late to say yay or nay to the event, to hail it or fend it off.* [...] *Anyone who resists pathos is resisting life itself — which is quite possible, as we know, but only at the expense of renouncing life, erasing*

4 Michel Henry understands co-pathos as a community made up of the sum of its living individuals. Hence the impossibility of separating community and individual (Henry 1990, pp. 160–179).

> *life. Nietzsche's* amor fati *catches up with us no matter how resigned we may be, no matter what impossible justification we may find: a hard lesson* (Waldenfels 2002a, pp. 124–125).

Also like this 'hard lesson' is *pathos* as the subject of the present study, which looks at the thoughts and destinies of historians and philosophers of art who mulled long over pathos and lived it — as a proving of themselves and as self-sacrifice — in amplitude, 'having run up against the solid rock of our frontiers' (Patočka 2004, p. 60).

At a time of harsh persecution, Růžena Vacková and Pavel Kropáček chose the route of 'proxy' and self-commitment and so too of self-sacrifice — a commitment in which *actio* and *passio*, *éthos* and *patos*, pervade one another and form a unity. Then there is their *passion* in the sense of a passion for art, but also in that of having consciously chosen suffering and sacrifice, a linkage that is the basis of their *pathic* existence. Their thinking on the history and theory of art and their affective-emotional experiencing of art constitute a unity with their attitude to aesthetics/ethics and their *passion*. If Bernhard Waldenfels writes of pathos as 'surprise par excellence', this *sur-prise* means being impacted by something radically alien, an event that brings about an unexpected twist: 'Pathos is surprise par excellence. It always comes *too soon* for us to be ready for it, and our response always comes *too late* for us to be quite up to the experience' (Waldenfels 2010, p. 325). Everything that is surprising, alien and awe-inspiring resides at the heart of what one knows, which makes the shock caused by the experience all the more powerful.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF AFFECTIVE RELIEFS: FROM THE PLASTICITY OF RELIEF TO PLASTICITY OF THE BODY

The life experience of Růžena Vacková was a frontier-straddling experience, just like her aesthetic experience as a researcher in classical archeology, ancient culture and the history of art, *and* as a connoisseur and, as she writes herself, a lover of the dramatic art. Her keen interest in fine arts and theatre, her ethics and commitment and her pedagogical *eros* are all intertwined and give her her particular identity. She straddled the frontiers between various different artistic media and modes of perception, between ethos and pathos, between different milieux, and likewise, condemned to death by the Nazis in February 1945, the frontier between life and death, freedom, persecution and imprisonment. The similarity between the theatre stage, which was Růžena Vacková's *passion*, and the room that saw her staged trial being played out in June 1952, when the class-based socialist regime sentenced her to twenty-two years in prison, is, in her 'life-story', staggeringly *real*.[5]

5 After the Communist putsch of 25 February 1948, Růžena Vacková was the only member of the teaching staff of Charles University to join the democratic students' march on Prague Castle and to protest — again as the only one — at the expulsion of students and colleagues from the University. On 22 February 1952 she was arrested at her flat, in June of the same year she faced trumped-up charges of 'spying for the Vatican and the USA' and 'plotting high treason' and was sentenced by the Brno State Court to twenty-two years in

The situation in which Růžena Vacková found herself during the Nazi occupation and again after February 1948 is the one that Levinas interprets as *Proxy* (*substitution*). It is the state of being at a particular place *on behalf of someone* that Bernhard Waldenfels takes as one of the main features of a pathic situation. 'Pathos appears in our presence like a meteor from some Greek star,' he writes (Waldenfels 2007, pp. 33–49), and it is this pathos of an 'ethical situation' that is also one of Vacková's main themes from the very outset of the war. 'In/stead (in someone's stead)…' remains a riddle, because it means more than just that someone stands proxy for someone at some place. The mystery of this 'in-stead' resides in the fact that 'I am *at the same time* where the Other is' (ibid., p. 34). Not as swapping roles or changing places. Besides ordinary forms of proxy (in politics or the law) there are also the forms of proxy that Waldenfels calls 'originary'. What makes them exceptional is that we *speak* for others: I am at the same time where the Other is, for whom — or through whom — I am speaking. '*On the Other's behalf* I say what he cannot say himself, and thereby I decide in favour of that which the other wants, but cannot himself defend' (ibid., p. 38).

This idea is also important to the conception of tragedy and the tragic to be found in Růžena Vacková's book *Výtvarný projev v dramatickém umění* (The Visual Aspect of Dramatic Art) and to her own fate. 'Corruption of the young', which was stressed at her June 1952 trial as a particularly aggravating circumstance, is, of course, for her *passion* as a historian and theorist of art and the theatre, as well as for her *passion* as a prisoner of totalitarian dictatorships, especially significant. While the point of Greek tragedy is the way its tragic (purifying) catharsis works, the *pathos* and *passion* of Růžena Vacková is linked to pathic infection — infection leading to *passio* — also as a response to the violence that besets us from without. Affected by such violence, she decides, during the time of German occupation and the Protectorate, in favour of being 'infected' with the *pathos* of the passive-active 'I can', accepting the position of 'standing proxy' for the Other or others with her own body and life. This got repeated in February 1948, when Vacková stood up for persecuted students, and just as they were being exposed to the violence of expulsion and persecution, she *wanted*, as she told the persecutors, to share their fate.[6] The uncompromising pathos of her 'I shall' is unparalleled in the history of Czech academia of the time. This pursuit of the *face-à-face* and contact (as con*tact*) really is the basic element in the personality of Růžena Vacková as human being, scholar and teacher. Plasticity as one of the specific

jail. Because she declined to be amnestied by the totalitarian regime as long as other innocent parties remained in jail for political or religious reasons, she spent fifteen years in Communist prisons. She was released in April 1967.

6 At the first meeting of the academic council of Charles University after 25 February 1948, when the 'action committee' of Communist students had already met, the Dean of the Arts Faculty, Jan Blahoslav Kozák, read out the action committee's motion to expel the students, and Růžena Vacková, who had been on the march to the Castle and at the demonstration against the Communist putsch, which had been broken up by the police. She alone stood by the students, pointing out that the demonstration was moral in character and ending her speech with the sentence: 'The shouting was moral in character, so if participation in the rally has become a criterion of expulsion, I wish to share their fate.' She was 'actioned out' by the action committee forthwith (Zvěřina 1993, p. 39).

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qualities of Roman art and the topic of space and how it is depicted are the themes that constitute the axis of both her thinking on art and aesthetics (from *Římské historické reliefy* [Roman Historical Reliefs] to *The Visual Aspect of Dramatic Art*) and her personal ethics.

This form of originary proxy takes place at the level of utterance, the level of what is utterable: by my speaking, the Other's claim also speaks from me. It is at this level that we enter, as Waldenfels writes, the domain of the pathic, though *not* of the pathetic. This is the pathos of the *Other* by which one is stricken: another's word, another's glance, another's gesture. 'In a particular way I am that other who I am standing proxy for. Others are not my duplicates, but my doubles, who come towards me from an unattainable proximity.' The experience of acting as proxy, the experience of being 'in the stead/instead of' (*in loco…*, *au lieu de…*, *an Stelle von…*) someone else, on whose behalf I am speaking, has, in Levinas' onto-theology, an ethical dimension and the radical form of obsession, persecution or being taken hostage by the Other. Taking responsibility for all is the requirement taken to the level of 'hyperbole'. But this radical form of the pathos of 'proxy' is the form that Růžena Vacková took upon herself.

In his *Analyses Concerning Passive Synthesis* Edmund Husserl speaks of 'affective relief', which is connected with various degrees and different kinds of affection. The term evokes a specific plasticity, tactility, or experience and discovery mediated by touch. The theme of 'practical' physicality in the lived present, affection, action and suffering (*Erleiden*), the relation between activity and passivity, occupies an important and special place after the last phase of Husserl's phenomenology. In his lectures on the phenomenology of intersubjectivity he speaks of possible contact mediated through the body (Husserl 1973/XV, p. 306). Passivity and activity, action and suffering are linked to touch and touchability. Any object, no matter how remote objectively, should, Husserl believes, be seen, in principle, as palpable and tangible. Anything that one may encounter is supremely dependent on the 'experiencing', suffering, touched and touching subject, since affection (always) has a basis in physicality. In addition to that, by the fact of sensing affections and objects we simultaneously evaluate them. 'Affective relief' (Husserl 1966, pp. 164, 168), part of the passive domain of 'doing and suffering' (Husserl 1973/XIV, p. 51), may also be understood, as Christian Lotz shows, as 'having a particular value' (Lotz 2002, pp. 19–39). Feeling is linked to moments and positions that have a value: not only is touch in and of itself a vehicle of values, but it also lends the nature of a value to 'affective relief overall'. Affections have an ethical dimension and reach, and without some evaluation (whether positive or negative) they are not possible: pain and suffering, compassion, penitence, shame etc.

In a remarkable fashion, Růžena Vacková's art-historical and art-theoretical thinking is likewise associated with plasticity and tactility, affectives that are, for her, correlated concepts and at the same time the basic concepts of depiction, whether in the graphic arts or the on-stage art of the actor. Their keystone in Vacková is *ethos*, the ethical dimension that springs from *pathos*, or, as she herself put it, from *pathemes*.

'Relief' is also the central theme in Vacková's higher doctoral thesis in Classical archaeology: *Roman Historical Reliefs* (Vacková 1929; 1936) which she deals with in two volumes that trace the evolution of the art of ancient Rome in terms first of form, then of content. Her focus is on action in the reliefs, the way the narrative of stories and events from history (the triumph, celebration of Caesar's constitutional reforms,

battle scenes etc.) is developed in them, but she also looks at reliefs with themes from mythology and reliefs on sarcophagi. Even in this early work of the late 1920s, one of the basic aspects of pathos shines through: the contrast between, or rather the counterpoint of, motion and rest, or motion that is evoked and amplified by movement. Most of the reliefs which Růžena Vacková looks at thematise distinctive *Pathosformeln*, in the Aby Warburg sense,[7] carved in stone: scenes of battle, sacrifice, triumph, homage, carrying off spoils, gladiatorial combat in the circus etc.

One aspect of the impact of the reliefs that comes early to the fore is their plasticity, the 'plasticity of form' that simultaneously reshapes an object: 'Material plasticity does more than define an object, it *deliberately remoulds it as to its likeness*.' In her book on the graphic aspect of dramatic art Vacková, in the context of the spatial peculiarities of the theatre, returns to the plasticity of relief with regard to the plasticity of the character in space:

> *Figures modelled with the same plasticity in a painting or on a relief are only the more plastic for being, as it were, close before our eyes, than figures further away. Greek painting or a Greek relief are quite close, quite plain to see. That they seem so real is due to other properties, namely idealisation of the figures and the fact that they do not recede into the depths of the background, but step out in front of the background. They enter our space, while lacking a space of their own. The impact of a high relief or a textured representational painting is analogous to the impact of the figures on a shallow stage. But the deeper, even notionally, the background behind the characters, the weaker the impression of their plasticity; on the other hand they gain more in 'reality'. The situation is analogous in a theatre with a deep stage* (Vacková 1948, p. 68).

COGNITION THROUGH SHAPE: THE PATHIC-SENSUAL ETHOS OF (DRAMATIC) ART GIVEN BODILY FORM

The three-dimensionality of relief, the figure of a man as a dynamic element, relief itself and its spatial setting, these are questions and phenomena with which Růžena Vacková already seized her early work of Roman reliefs and which prefigured her

7 This is one of the most provocative terms in twentieth-century art theory and the brainchild of art historian Aby Warburg (1866–1929). His concern was with the history of art as a history of human expressions and gestures. He started toying with the idea of *Pathosformeln* back in the 1890s, and the term was to become key to a new approach to art history as the history of human culture, interpretable as a history of human emotions and passions, basically unaltered since antiquity right down to the present, merely having an overlay from how civilisation has evolved. The main indication of Warburg's 'pathos formulae' is not so much the physical gesture as the mental, latent, archaic, instinctive, Dionysian, orgiastic, un-conscious 'gesture' that had fascinated Warburg ever since he wrote his thesis on Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* and *Primavera* (1893). As such his *Pathosformeln* become a medium of 'mnemic energy', a trail through human experience with all its passions and pains and extreme states of being, and a 'symbol for the unutterable demonic forces to whose tender mercies our existence is left', as Ernst Cassirer wrote in his obituary for Aby Warburg (Cassirer 2004, s. 368–374).

chef-d'œuvre *Výtvarný projev v dramatickém umění*. That book came about at a time and place within Czech culture that marked a major revival of interest in the theatre, acting and stage culture, but also the 'stagedness' and staging of the 'drama of life' not just within the theatre, but also in art and the theory and history of theatre. Interest in the theatre while the country was under foreign occupation, the phenomena of stagedness, theatricalisation and theatrical stylisation (of the reality of the Protectorate) went hand in hand with the considerable tension that arose from the asymmetry between reality and illusion, between the without — the world beyond the borders — and the within, a tension that could be understood as an experience of re-realisation, which, according to Bernhard Waldenfels, does not mean that something simply disappears, but that the previous order is subverted, much as re-realisation means a new arrangement. Waldenfels has it that derealisation — as experimenting with reality — may be described as processes of anomalisation under which our grasp on reality is transformed: 'Because everything that we encounter is invariably understood *as something*, and reality itself is transformed indirectly by it' (Waldenfels 1998, p. 223). This also covers various forms of (psycho-)pathological transformations of reality, experiments in art and thought, and a whole range of 'anomalising' effects is in turn constituted by disturbances of context, desituation, the virtualisation of reality, the idea of 'a world beyond our own', etc.

The tension and asymmetry between without and within, theatre and reality, is apparently linked to the situation of 'being bounded' on the one hand and that of 'being kept outside' certain bounds on the other, which induces an intense sense of the alienness of the world and one's own self (Waldenfels 1990, p. 32). By the Munich agreement of 1938 the prewar Czechoslovak Republic first had different borders imposed on it, and later — by a violation of the original frontiers — it was set new 'bounds' by an alien power as a 'protectorate', deprived of autonomy, and within the firm bounds of these imposed frontiers, the population of the protectorate of 'Böhmen und Mähren' were exposed to persecution and violence. On one's own turf, occupied by a foreign power, one felt like an outsider or stranger. An irruption of the unfamiliar into one's own sphere, the division of the world 'in which we live' (in the sense of *Lebenswelt*) into 'the world of home' (*Heimwelt*) and an 'alien world' (*Fremdwelt*), in terms of Husserl's phenomenology (Husserl 1973/XV, pp. 176, 232–233), this being 'in thrall' to outsiders and their demands, 'shifts a being's centre of gravity to outside of that being' (Lévinas 1979).

The ethical discourse, ethos, of a drama is one of the main themes in Růžena Vacková's book on the visual aspect of dramatic art, which she treats as 'supremely moral':

> *It works as an exemplum. It illuminates and elucidates 'unknown, inner and unique circumstances', it places the individual, as a specific moral, psychological and physiological being in visible, patent relationships with other people, in a pivotal context, in a kind of collision within a framework of given events and circumstances, it presents conflicts and forces him to take a stand* (Vacková 1948, p. 628).

For Vacková the ethos of a drama is inseparable from its pathos. Pathos, the patheme that underlies ethos:

> *Each character in a Greek drama also has his/her own patheme. That is to say, s/he has both an internal and an external destiny, which they have to weather on stage to reach a clarification of ethos. They suffer dramatically by their own or others' actions.* [...] *Yes, the modern play, and, if there are any, modern dramas, are tragedies of the patheme. Modern drama makes a diagnosis of suffering* (ibid., pp. 634–635).

The idea of the truth and reality of the theatre and dramatic art, as one of the basic intentions of Růžena Vacková's book, and the theatricality, the stage-managed 'reality' of the wartime Protectorate — it is as if Vacková has inverted them: she is thinking about the truth of the theatre, 'dramatic truth' and 'the actors' truth', which goes beyond a 'truth that is *merely* being illustrated graphically', and 'truth' is also the very last word in her book (ibid., pp. 261). She is thinking of the peculiar reality of the drama, or, more exactly, of graphically dramatic art, at a time when the everyday reality and 'normality' of life under the Protectorate was veiled in an illusion of 'truth'. For Vacková, the truthfulness and reality of the theatre rests on several aspects: its graphic materiality, the physicality of the 'actor-as-human being' who 'represents man in a drama of men' (ibid., p. 563) and on how the spectator is affected by the pathos of the actor, which, in Vacková's conception is what underlies the ethos of drama.

When Růžena Vacková writes of the 'sculptural material of the body' and of the character in a drama, she is emphasising the fact that 'the body of a character is of flesh and blood, of which all theatre practitioners have become convinced, most notably Craig' (ibid., p. 258). It is the 'artist's corporeality' that becomes his 'artistic corporeality' on stage, and this 'shifts the mere optical evidence' onto a quite different plane of a 'more visceral kind' (ibid., p. 260). Dramatic art bonds directly onto 'the person who creates it with his body, proportioning it to his own mental and physical measure, as onto the person who is present at it as an art event' (ibid., p. 205). This is that physically dramatic graphicality of the 'phenomenal body' (Erika Fischer-Lichte's term) that allows the spectator to have an extraordinarily strong sense of the presence of the actor. In its specific 'materiality', the phenomenal body takes control of the stage and actually demands the spectator's attention (Fischer-Lichte 2004, p. 165).

Růžena Vacková writes that 'a character in a drama is not just a physical being, but is also *plastic*', and a character's plasticity is one of the main aspects of a production. Plasticity and relief are terms to which she constantly returns in her book about theatre and are a remarkable cross-reference to her examination and interpretation of the reliefs of ancient Rome. The plasticity of the actor, the space on stage, the *graphicality* of theatre and drama, the *graphic* in the art of drama, all this underpins the truthfulness of theatre, as Vacková writes at the end of the book: 'graphic art, provided it is of some value aesthetically, cannot lie' (Vacková 1948, p. 649). Writing of the space of tragedy, she says that it is the 'fatality of humankind, man's uniqueness' which 'every Greek hero contains. It is the metaphysical aura of his being. [...] the time-space continuum of tragedy does not lie in the past. It is in the imaginary space of the future; in the space beyond the play: in the ethical resonance of the tragedy. Heroic times that did not fear death felt, above all, the catharsis at the end and saw — the victory of virtue over the day-to-day' (ibid., p. 350–351).

Dramatic art, art in general, as the revelation and a source of cognizance of reality? This certainly does not mean that Růžena Vacková lost sight, even as she theo-

rised on the art of Classical Antiquity, of the fundamental opposition between art and reality or of the whole long tradition on the basis of which art and any work of art were understood and interpreted in light of this opposition, which, in a specific sense, guaranteed art its autonomy. The opposition between art and reality creates other oppositions: ordinary–exalted, aesthetic–ethical, aesthetic–political etc. In some situations the one plainly cannot be separated from the other. One such situation was the theatre under foreign occupation and the Protectorate.

For Růžena Vacková as an historian and theorist of art it follows that 'real', as she writes, art — real also because its essence is 'moral pathos' — leads not to the creation of a *semblance*, but to an intensification and growth of actual *being*. At the end of the chapter on graphic composition in drama she writes: 'However, our focus has been on the nature of the artistic realities that persuade the spectator by visual means that dramatic art is concerned, like him, with the purpose of his life.'[8] Vacková sees the essence of the work of art in its plasticity and form, an idea that is fundamental to her conception of the evolution of the history and theory of art: from her work on Roman reliefs, through *The Visual Aspect of Dramatic Art* to *The Science of Style*, where the stress is on 'cognizance through form': 'Thus does art reveal the cognition and explication of the substance of reality generally and in all branches of art through specific tropes and figures, i.e. through form. In form, as the *ratio rei*, the analogy between the essence of being and the essence of discovered reality, as materialised in the work of art, is expressed through a *tertium comparationis*' (Vacková 1993).

It could be suggested that Růžena Vacková's progression as art historian and theorist and university professor and political prisoner, facing uncomprisingly up to, and in resistance against, Nazism and class-based socialism, also proceeded from a pathic experience of the plasticity of form — the materiality of Roman reliefs — to the pathicness and *passion* of her acting as *proxy* and adopting responsibility vis-à-vis the Other, to 'moral pathos' and the pathically inspired 'power of ethos', or as she puts it, to the 'hyperbolicality' of her ethical discourse and so her an-archic freedom.

PASSIVITY MORE PASSIVE THAN ALL PASSIVITY: THE PATHOS AND PRINCIPLE OF AESTHETICAL/ETHICAL 'CONTAGION'

All forms of representation, whether in the graphic arts, theatre, film or rituals and cults, are playing a part in pathic events, in the 'impact' of the affect that seizes the spectator, listener or participant at such happenings. In her study on 'spectating as contagion', *Zuschauen als Ansteckung* (Fischer-Lichte 2005), Erika Fischer-Lichte shows that not only (spectatorial, aesthetic) 'contagion', but also 'catharsis' as the *telos*

8 Ibid., p. 464. In a letter to her father from prison on 30 June 1958 she refers to her collaboration with the architect of religious buildings František Čermák: 'Those were the most wonderful years of my life, when I was permitted to place a hand on the pulse of artistic creation. I was sure that even then the accumulating sources of powers of cognition were not unprecedented. Artistic creation is the oldest atomic powerhouse in the world and ever and again this power has moulded man's innate cognitive processes' (Vacková 1994, pp. 119–120).

of tragedy, a term that goes back to the beginnings of Western reflections on and theorising about aesthetics, come from the discourse of medicine, and both relate to a process of physical transformation: the latter to a cleansing of the body that should lead to recovery, the former to the transmission of an infection to a healthy body. Both are cases of 'liminality' (ibid., p. 35). Here, too, it is the actual seeing that, in the spectator, perceiver, feeler, triggers the force that transforms: 'Contagion happens through watching, it happens as we watch' (ibid., p. 37). It is the bodily presence of the actor that carries with it the potential for transformation by physically embodying passions.

Being affected by an aesthetic(ally pleasurable) experience is a specific kind of affection and a subject that interested eighteenth-century aesthetics and art theory in respect of the cultivation of man's aesthetic sense through excitement, through a stirring of the emotions and passions — an affection that was two-pronged: it seduced and it infected. Way back in the theatre of the eighteenth century, the 'infection' of the spectator acted through the forces that were unleashed by the depiction of passions in the body of the actor. The idea was that these forces passed through the actor's gaze into the body of the spectator, who, mesmerised by the rendition on stage, was totally 'immersed' in the body of the actor. Once in this state, the spectator is transformed into a sensitive and sensuous being involved physically in the action. Both the phenomenal, real body of the actor and his make-believe, semiotic body have their particular 'contagious' potential. The concept of 'contagion' applies to the process whereby the feelings being expressed in and through the body being perceived are called forth in the perceiver. The 'contagion' that leads the spectator at once into an emotionally highly charged state does not leave him a remote observer: having been 'infected' through his perception of the passions and emotions portrayed, he is drawn into the action. He is experiencing forces that act on him 'physically' and he cannot resist them. It is no coincidence that the principle of 'contagion', which was seen as positive in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discourse about the theatre, became undesirable in the nineteenth century as the cult of cleanliness, hygiene and public health intensified. Here, 'contagion' also meant a transformation of the body's condition at the threshold between sickness and health, and, in relation to the aesthetic experience of an audience, a borderline experience: on the borders between different artistic media which 'contaminated' one another, between art and life, the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic. Unlike the catharsis principle with its horizon of purification, rehabilitation and renewal in the sense of *restitutio in integrum*, the contagion principle meant a liminal condition that could mean destruction and decline leading to destabilisation and crisis (ibid., p. 49).

The 'contagion' principle, which Erika Fischer-Lichte believes has expressed the aesthetic experience of the modern theatre and performing arts since roughly the mid-twentieth century, is also significant, in the context that concerns us here, as the subject's 'contagion' with *passio*, resistance and sacrifice. If violence may be taken as a specific form of collective 'contagion', a form of 'contagious' violence that engulfs entire social groups, then a pathic response to it and a decision in favour of a such a response even in the knowledge of the consequences, may equally be viewed as a contagion. There is a correlation between infection and victim, violence and pathos, the ambivalently sacred and the unclean. This is contagion by pathos towards

suffering in the sense of René Girard's '*désir mimétique*' (Girard 1961, pp. 15–18) meaning a passively activated capacity for mimesis. It is this passivity that makes longing a matter of contagion.

In February 1944, at the National Theatre in Prague, Jiří Frejka directed a 'dramatic poem in six tableaux', *Císařův mim* (The Emperors' Mime), by the poet and dramatist Václav Renč. It is the story of the Gaulish actor Genesius, whose troupe, in 303 AD, puts on a play for the Emperor Diocletian, a satire about Christians in which he undergoes a parody of baptism. In the course of the play he experiences a miraculous conversion, his stage role becomes a reality and the pagan actor dies a Christian martyr when, before a Roman audience and their emperor and fully cognizant of his fate as a martyr, he professes allegiance to Christianity and a longing for true *imitatio*. Renč's play is an adaptation of Lope de Vega's *Lo fingido verdadero* of 1622, as its subtitle indeed says: 'Variations on a theme by Lope de Vega.' This 'comedia de santo' became the model for Jean Rotrou's tragedy *Le Véritable Saint-Genest* (1645, pub'd 1647). In Rotrou it is the actor's performance that is accentuated, how he identifies with the part, which is also a pathic 'contagion' with the Christian faith; this amounts to his true (*véritable*) being, as opposed to the illusion of a mere part to be played. Aesthetic 'contagion' has an ethical dimension: Genest's artistry resides in his exceptional affective impact on the audience (and on himself), his ability to unleash with his own body the physical effect of this 'contagion', notwithstanding the fact that he obviously perceives his conversion as a miracle and a mercy.

The ethical and at one and the same time pathic dimension of Renč's adaptation of a Baroque *tragoedia sacra*, which is directed at the problem of identity and the authenticity of the true being of modern man through his resolve in favour of *passio*, and which in the occupied Prague of early 1944 must have had a powerful effect, as the critics indeed confirm, echoes Patočka's idea of a decision taken in favour of life 'in amplitude':

> *By launching themselves into amplitude they* [Socrates, Pascal, Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky] *enjoy the freedom that is man's own, and even make real freedom out of one that is still only possible, because by acting as they do, they arrive at what man really is and thereby at what he* can really be. [...] *There is no true activity of the spirit arising solely from the sphere of ideas. Our inner borders, the world that lives within us, are not what pains us primarily. On the other hand a pain registered and borne in amplitude teaches us to discover the world and shows us that we are free in how we try to make sense of it* (Patočka 2004, pp. 60–61).

The phenomenon of aesthetic 'contagion' as a 'liminal experience', as understood by Erika Fischer-Lichte, may be interpreted at this point also as a pathic infection tending towards *passio* and simultaneously as a response to some violence bearing down on one from without, and that is the decision taken by Pavel Kropáček and Růžena Vacková. This is pathos and affect as a both aesthetic and ethical principle, 'speaking' (first and foremost) through the body as the 'source' of the aesthetic/ethical contagion and as the first stage in refinding oneself in the pathos of having uttered 'I can'.

THE YARDSTICK HERE IS, AS EVER IN CULTURE, MAN: PAVEL KROPÁČEK AND THE *INNER FORCE* OF PATHOS

In the summer of 1936, the young art historian Pavel Kropáček (1915–1943), having almost completed his doctoral thesis on late-Gothic Bohemian painting at Charles University in Prague, visited the great Hieronymus Bosch exhibition at the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, later reviewing it in the art journal *Volné směry* (1937) and accompanying the review with some fine reproductions of Bosch's pictures (Kropáček 1937). In his article, Kropáček perceives Bosch's art as anticipating how painting in the Low Countries would evolve, making it rather more than episodes of 'infernal and macabre scenes. Though these lie at the heart of the present-day interest in Bosch' (ibid., p. 326). Despite the apparitions and 'monsters devised with considerable invention', Kropáček writes that the modern viewer is often affected by these late-Gothic *Totentänze* in terms of the grotesque:

> *Let it be added to what has already been said that almost all these macabre 'little monsters' could be identified with a number of basic schemas that were not some kind of oneiric, out-of-the-blue discoveries of Bosch's, but ancient schemas and symbols of the horrors of the Apocalypse and Hell. It is the matter-of-factness of Bosch and all others of the same stamp, the interest in naturalist detail that permeates all of late-Gothic art, most strikingly in architecture, that remoulds these schemata and imbues them with new life* (ibid.).

Writing of Bosch, Kropáček is cognizant of the research of his day, notably the account by Max J. Friedländer, whose book he mentions.[9] While Kropáček's 1937 article perceives Bosch's art as on the boundary between a weird spookiness and farcical grotesquerie — the spirit in which Johan Huzinga treats Bosch in his *Autumn of the Middle Ages* (*Herfsttijd der middeleeuwen*, 1919), in his 1942 study *Human Automata in Art* he describes Bosch as a painter of horror:

> *His pictures border on the bizarrely ridiculous; more exactly, **setting out** from that border they cross into the domain of the horrific. His horror is based on the bizarre, with human and all other animal forms being deposed into the non-human, impacted by the horror of the mechanical. The sheer dread that this painter, this imaginative genius, can evoke with his composition of bodies and machines in the Madrid* Hell *and* Eden! *Here it is easy to gain a clear appreciation of the boundary between dread and laughter and also what a dehumanised human form means* (Kropáček 1941–1942, p. 210; emphasis as in the original).

Phrases like 'horror of the mechanical', 'composition of bodies and machines' and 'dehumanised human form' reveal how far Kropáček's perception of Bosch's image of man and the world had changed in 1941. It gives Bosch an avant-garde pedigree along with the Cubists, Futurists and Surrealists, though not as the painter of fantastical,

9 Kropáček refers to Vol. 5 (Berlin 1927) of Friedländer's monumental 14-volume work, *Die altniederländische Malerei*, devoted to Geertgen tot Sint Jans and Hieronymus Bosch.

oneiric visions that Karel Teige, the theorist of the Czech avant-garde, saw at the time (Teige 1994, p. 87), or as the 'integral visionary' described later by André Breton in *L'Art magique* (Breton 1957, pp. 175, 178), but as a painter who gave visionary expression to the loss of the meaning of 'the concept "man"', which Kropáček believed culminated in avant-garde art.

The perspective from which Kropáček perceives the world of Bosch's pictures as a world of horrors and man dehumanised is remarkably close to that of Hans Sedlmayr, who devotes a chapter to Bosch and his 'world of Hell' in *Verlust der Mitte* (1948; Sedlmayr 1957, pp. 186–189). In this book, which was slated by the critics for its conservatism, yet despite the pathos of its apocalypticality, is important, hence Umberto Eco's description of it as one of the 'fundamental texts in well-informed discourse on modern civilisation', Sedlmayr insists that it is 'only since Bosch that we have anything like a picture of Hell made visible' (ibid., 186). Most notably new is the 'likeness of infernal beings' as a 'product(s) of boundless cosmic fornication, in which even inanimate objects can be crossed with living beings. All this lies way beyond the limits of anything Classical Antiquity could produce,' meaning the Classical image of man:

> *Now it would be quite wrong to see in all this nothing more than the grim quirks of grotesque and whimsical imagination. Bosch's phantasmagoria is something very different from that. It arises from a profound experience of a world that has renounced God, an experience whose very vividness casts a spell over that mind. The result is a visible physiology of Hell* [...] (ibid., p. 188).

Sedlmayr, too, although his view of Bosch's infernal visions was screened by the events of the war, sees in the 1920s discovery of Bosch's art 'a profound historical justification' for his becoming 'one of the original parents of Surrealism' (ibid.), though not, as Sedlmayr stresses, for his 'integral visionariness', but precisely for the dehumanisation and evacuation of the essence of humanity, in Bosch as an expression of experiencing the shock to the stability of the world as man's *Weltheim* at the end of the Middle Ages, in the Surrealists as a consequence and expression of the nihilism and programmatic dehumanisation of art initiated by the revolutionary events in France. Kropáček's case against the avant-garde does not spring from a position of Christian deism like Sedlmayr's, but stems from his position, one might say, in defence of Classical and Classicist anthropocentrism as the essence of European Humanism.

The attention that Kropáček devotes to Bosch is driven by a particular sensibility that today we can appreciate properly: in part it leads to the question of how Bosch's art was received in Czech artistic circles at the turning-point when the Second World War broke out, and in part to the aspect of aggressive imagination, considered shortly after the war's end by Jacques Lacan, who refers explicitly to Bosch's partialised image of man. Lacan discusses this problem in his study *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I* (*la fonction du Je*), i.e. as shaping the awareness of self. He first presented his conception in August 1936 — coincidentally at a time when the great Bosch exhibition was running in Rotterdam (10. 7.–15. 10. 1936) — at the 14th Congress of the International Psychoanalytical Association in Marienbad, where he met with gross misunderstanding and rejection (his paper was terminated by the chairman after ten

minutes), but in 1949 he re-presented it in published form (Lacan 1949, pp. 449–455). Here he writes of the 'dismembered image of the body' as a sign of the 'aggressive disintegration of the subject' (Lacan 1986, p. 97).

Kropáček, who, shortly before his arrest by the Gestapo in 1941, was writing about the 'horror of the mechanical' in connection with the monsters in Bosch's paintings, touches on a phenomenon in Bosch that was aptly expressed after the war by the art historian Carl Linfert. The image of bizarrely 'routine', mechanised violence is given a 'human' twist:

> *All the unreality, exaggeration, quirkiness is merely a disguise for things that are real taken to a cruel extreme.* [...] *Even the monsters that are least human and most alien to man are allegories of specimens of mankind either suffering or dispensing violence.* [...] *In painting such extremes, he was able to show the detachment on both sides, almost like some mechanism of alleviation, and it is that which, every time, sets the gloomy accent of brutality. He was the first painter ever to show us what it is like when something remote (because it has remained hidden) or unimaginable pops up in the middle of reality* (Linfert 1970, pp. 25, 37).

Pavel Kropáček, fourteen years younger than Růžena Vacková, was of the generation that kept a critical distance from the ideals of the interwar avant-garde, its programmes and manifestos, its utopia and optimistic belief in the final fusion of art and life (and with that the 'end of art'). This was not because Kropáček had lost interest in the synthesis, differently construed, that he stresses in most of his essays and articles, but because he believed that all avant-garde art — from Futurism to Surrealism — had become far removed from 'man and his human sense', as he wrote in *Human Automata in Art* (Kopáček 1941–1942, p. 210). In October 1939, having defended his thesis on *Painting in the Age of the Hussites: Czech Panel-Painting in the First Half of the Fourteenth Century* (Kropáček 1946), he adopted the public role of spokesman for and theorist of the group of seven artists whose first exhibition was held that month at the Topič salon and who were duly called the *Seven in October*.

Dehumanisation as a symptom of modern art is also key to Hans Sedlmayr's argument in the aforementioned *Verlust der Mitte*. Sedlmayr starts with the notion that nineteenth- and twentieth-century art reflects the process of dehumanisation unleashed by the French Revolution and the consequences of that process: the severing of the links between art, man, nature and the spiritual. He believes that the art of the last two centuries reaches its acme wherever the idea of man is preserved. It should be added that Sedlmayr had completed *Verlust der Mitte* in 1941, but with the war over he omitted one chapter that reflected the national-socialist ideology of anti-modernism in art. After the war, Sedlmayr gave the book's original intension a rather different twist betokened by the 'defence' of man. In 1955 came Sedlmayr's polemical *Die Revolution der modernen Kunst*, published in the 'Rowohlts deutsche Enzyklopädie' series (Hamburg), of which the general editor was Ernesto Grassi, then Professor of Philosophy at Munich University. Here Sedlmayr picks up on *Verlust der Mitte* and one chapter, entitled *De-rangement as the Refuge of Liberty* (*Das Ver-rückte als Zuflucht der Freiheit*), is a critical reflection on Surrealism. It is remarkable that here Sedlmayr, like Kropáček, draws a connection between the Surrealist demonstratively dehuman-

ised 'man of total trash' (i.e., the image of man as a collage made up of all kinds of materials) and the image of man in Hieronymus Bosch (with reference to the interpretation of art historian Wilhelm Fraenger), who showed that 'beneath the snatched-off masks of life, the horror of absurdity gapes back at us' (Sedlmayr 1996, p. 110). This is not to say that Kropáček's reflections on modern art also set out from anti-modernist beginnings. Kropáček was ever an adherent and defender of modern art, whatever reservations he may have had about the analytical avant-garde, whose efforts he saw growing dangerously in the late 1930s into academic torpor, as he writes in the essay *The Shape of Modern Art* (*Podoba mladého umění*, c. 1940–1941).

Kropáček plainly links two key concepts of his thinking on art and aesthetics, *pathos* and *monumentality*, to the concept of classicality, as his essay *On Classicism* (*O klasicismu*, 1939; Kropáček 2002–2003, pp. 301–305) indicates. For Kropáček, pathos, monumentality and classicality are — one may say — concepts that apply synonymously to 'living man' and 'living art'. In a sense, he is also concerned to rehabilitate pathic physicality: the 'classical' man of ancient Greece is, in his conception, a universal embodiment of mankind, in contrast to the human automaton as 'man deprived of his humanity', as he wrote in the essay *Human Automata in Art* (1942; Kropáček 1941–1942, p. 209).

Kropáček's idea of 'classicality' and the 'living man' is interpretationally the more attractive, the more radically was the art of his times penetrated by profound scepticism towards the 'new' humanisation of man, rising to the denial of his humanity and individuality. Kropáček's insistence on the postulate of 'faith in man' and his conviction that 'there is only sense where there is life' (Kropáček, unpublished typescript, 1942?), is symptomatic of his own pathic experience of art and his pathic existence. His approach to art, to himself and to life is one of affective impactedness and sensory experience and enjoyment of the self. It is no accident that Kropáček sees in 'human automata' an extreme perversion — as he writes — of the very 'sense of the concept "man"' (Kropáček 1941–1942, p. 210). The suffering of the last months of his life, leading up to his martyr's death in Auschwitz, amounts to an acceptance of this radical form of pathos as a state of being stricken by violence and pain. With the sufferer's consciousness retaining, as Levinas writes, at least a minimal interval between it and the evil that threatens to engulf and destroy it, it has a chance of being transformed into volition that is heroic. Passivity in suffering that carries a strong core of activity within it, springs from an awareness of suffering for another.

INSPIRED HEROISM AND THE PATHOS OF MONUMENTALITY

Pavel Kropáček returns to the problem of 'living art' as the work of a 'living artist' in most of his essays and papers on the history and/or aesthetics of art. What does the pathos in/of art mean for him? And monumental art? In his landmark essay *The Future of Monumental Art* (*Budoucnost monumentálního umění*, 1941) he states that pathos, as a 'rousing, internally compelling force', addresses not individuals, but a community capable of acting collectively, for, as he is at pains to stress, 'a real monument could hardly make a mark in privacy' (Kropáček 1947–1948, p. 62). A major criterion of

monumental art is rhythm and pathos, since 'without pathos monumental art turns into decor' (ibid.). Right from the outset, Kropáček seeks to dispel any mistrust that might present itself were one to be reading this essay on monumentalism, written in 1941, a time of Nazi bombast and returns to 'classicisms' of various shapes and forms, when he stresses that 'genuine pathos', as the essence of monumental art, has no 'feature of propaganda' (ibid.). Of the essence is *expression*, not narration, and its fundamental yardstick is 'as ever in culture, man'. References to the plastic art of ancient Greece suggest that Kropáček links monumentality and pathos (in art) with the idea of 'primitiveness' in the sense of individuality and authenticity, in which he sees the basic features of a 'monumental, antiformalist simplicity' that, following classicial antiquity, he discerns in 'the whole of early Christian culture' (ibid., p. 65). Antiformalist 'simplicity'? This notion unwittingly evokes Winckelmann's aesthetic ideal of 'sublime simplicity and silent grandeur' in *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764). Although for obvious reasons Kropáček does not refer to Winckelmann by name here (though he does mention him in *On Classicism*, the essay from October 1939), this does carry an echo of the idea that the internal dynamics of how art evolves works to a pattern of progress and decline, classicism and primitivism, 'monumental' and 'ivory-tower' art, to use Kropáček's terminology.

Kropáček meditates on the 'great, but simple entities' that will constitute the essence of the new style of the future, not atmosphere, still-life or 'small-scale narrative' (Kropáček 1947–1948, p. 65), that's to say elements of genre. With this aesthetic and taste in art Kropáček is closer to Winckelmann than he would surely be loth to admit himself. For him, the future is peculiarly fused with the past, a return to primitivism and (modern) archaism, as he perceived it in 'the pathos of the heroes of Greek archaic sculpture' (ibid., p. 62). His rejection of 'formalism' with its elements of 'decomposition' in favour of re-found individuality evokes the idea of a new monumentality, as Georg Simmel described it in his philosophy of art with regard to Rodin and the verse of Stefan George and Rainer Maria Rilke. Synthesis, vitality, movement — these are what Simmel interprets as symptomatic of the new monumentality in art. But then for Kropáček 'monumental' is the main attribute of Rodin's work. In an article written to mark the centenary of the sculptor's birth (1940), he makes the point that Rodin 'rounded off the hundred-year evolution of French sculpture, joining it organically to the acme of European sculpture and thereby also opening great new possibilities. If today, a hundred years after his birth, we go back to his work, we realise that no superlative can epitomise his intrinsically persuasive monumental creations or encompass his importance' (Kropáček 1940, p. 528).[10] It is striking that the concept 'modern' is not to be found at any point in the text, much as we might expect it to in a text about the founder of twentieth-century sculpture. Kropáček replaced it with 'monumental' or more accurately 'monumentality': for him, 'monumental pathos' (Kropáček 1947–1948, p. 62) is a synonym of modernness.

10 Of the famous statue of Honoré de Balzac Kropáček says: 'Rodin wanted to make this dumpy little man as monumental as possible, yet without any false pathos, so that it would comport as well as possible with his life's work. Hence he dressed him, in a striking contrapposto stance, in a free-flowing dressing-gown whose open surfaces created an effective monumental framework' (Kropáček 1940, p. 528).

No less striking is the Winckelmannesque predilection for the archaic and his instinctive leaning — for all Winckelmann's apologia to classicism and classicality — towards 'primitivism' as something original and authentic. The fact that Kropáček wrote his essay *On Classicism* in 1939 is symptomatic. In *The Future of Monumental Art* he maintains that the new monumental art can only be brought about by an abrupt change, by no less than a 'leap into monumentality' (Kropáček 1947–1948, p. 72). He sets out from the idea of 'rhythm in the evolution' of art, stressing at the outset that 'within any cultural entity, the evolution of art proceeds according to a particular basic rhythm found in every culture despite differences in content' (ibid., p. 62). Pathos itself has a 'broad rhythm', the evolution of art has its 'units of rhythm', and a work of art, in Kropáček's understanding here, is a 'crossroads of two currents — indeed *currents*, given that in art *pinpoint* intersections are extremely rare. One current, let's call it the vertical one, is the rhythm of evolution and its individual stages, of which each is unique and sorts the various facts and simple primary motifs, of form and content, into distinct hierarchies. The other current, which we can call horizontal, is the particular character of a culture that distinguishes it from other cultures. It is determined by the social structure of its carriers, tradition and the particular conditions of ethnicity and geography' (ibid., p. 67).

The idea of the 'non-contemporariness of the contemporary', the concepts of the 'ponderous rhythm of profound pathos', 'agitated rhythm', the idea of axes of time etc. have a bearing on the pluralist model of art history of Wilhelm Pinder, whom Kropáček also acknowledges explicitly. Kropáček was evidently impressed by Pinder's anti-positivist and anti-causal conception of art history, where the 'undulating' motion of history allows links to be drawn among all the ages and rejects the reduction of the history of art to an 'Indian-file' history of style. And the image of an holistic ontological approach to the entirety of history and the world, the content and purpose of cognition being construed ontologically, and the idea of the inner cohesion and identification of man with his world, fundamentally distinguish Kropáček's conception of art both from the avant-garde model and from Structuralist and anti-holistic theories of art.

It says most that as Kropáček worked on the corpus of Czech Gothic painting he was promoting the theories of his co-evals in the *Seven in October*: his reflexions on the art of the late Middle Ages are through the prism of the art of his own times and vice versa.[11] Hence he found the parallel between fifteenth-century and contempo-

11 Today it might seem paradoxical that Kropáček was acknowledging an art historian who became fatefully entangled in National Socialism after 1933. However, Kropáček is referring to Pinder's 1926 work *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas*, where the German erected his generational model of art history on the idea of 'evolutionary rhythm'; it also seems that Kropáček paid no attention to Pinder's subsequent work of the 1930s. From today's point of view, the Pinder model, which does merit a place in history, is of little use to a conception of the history and evolution of art, though in its day it came as a liberating response to positivism. Pinder is against 'anonymous art history' based on the idea of the linear development of successive styles. In opposition to this 'facile schema' he erects a model of a 'time-space continuum', time as a multidimensional space, a system of coordinates that arise in parallel with the ordering of strata of time and the overlap-

rary art obvious. Pinder, who sought to steer clear of value and normative judgements on various eras, looked at the generation problem on the basis of a time-space system of coordinates, the axes of time and space that define the artist and his work. In the Pinder model, generations in art are what tie the coordinates together and bring about the phenomenon of the 'non-contemporariness of the contemporary'.

The 'whole human being', 'living art', the 'living artist', 'the reality of life' and other such are formulations to which Kropáček returns time and again as synonyms for what he calls 'pathetic dynamism', the 'inner power of pathos' and suchlike. 'Living art' — 'living artist': here we might also add 'living image' (*tableau vivant*) and ask: How, in his time, did Kropáček understand this concept in relation to aesthetics and art, given that he writes of pictures as 'living artistic organisms' (Kropáček 1946, p. 21)? Since he also turns his attention to the transformation of humans into automata as well as to the magical animation of the lifeless, this suggests that this is a topic of a particular urgency to (not only) Kropáček at the start of the Second World War, one that leads to a question of a more general aesthetic impact, that of the peculiarity of human existence that makes man at once human and non-human, as Kropáček was soon to know 'first-hand'. Automata and automatedness constitute a liminal instance of man's possibilities; they evoke a sense of horrific extraneousness, also because they are products of the interplay of the human spirit and nature. The outcome is a bizarre 'mirror image', an interface between man and machine that disconcerts.

Kropáček asks after the sense of life, then provides the answer: 'human life makes its own sense because of necessity it relates to itself. Having a relation to themselves is the substance of all things, without which they would vanish without confines, they would simply not exist' (Kropáček, unpublished typescript, 1942?). In this connection, Kropáček cites Emmerson: 'A hero is one who is unmistakably condensed' since a life that is supposed to have sense is

> *a constant struggle and constant coming to terms, which, if you please, is not yet its sense, being merely form. As this uninterrupted process of coming to terms unfolds, great and painfully convoluted crises arise, and these, if breathed on by real life, acquire their own sense. These are primarily periods of transition, when sense, its companion in the life of either the individual or society, changes. Although crises rarely pass without sacrifices and without blood, they are nevertheless an ineluctable necessity for a life that is to be truly lived. For only by means of them can an individual or sundry alliances find their true and truest sense, the sense for which they arose and which matches them best. This, of course, turns a crisis into one of life's most precious experiences of all* (ibid.).

ping lives of individual artists: in any period each artistic and creative life has its particular time 'optics', that is every artist perceives his own time in his own way. Pinder describes this phenomenon as the 'non-contemporariness of the contemporary'. As an 'alternative' model to the prevailing model of the causal and linear development of styles Pinder arrives at 'polyphony' and a pluralism of styles and forms. European art as a whole differs from the art of other parts of the world by constantly changing shape. Hence Pinder's belief that having a generational rhythm is unique to Europe and European art (Pinder 1961, pp. 138–140).

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For Kropáček there is sense 'wherever there is life'. That is, despite — or because of — life's tragicality and 'tragic pathos', *passion* and the will to self-sacrifice. Pathos as the 'inner force' of art and life. This is also an idea that takes us back to the central thesis of Paul Ludwig Landsberg's philosophical anthropology: the humanisation of man.[12] At the end of his *Einführung in die philosophische Anthropologie* (1934) Landsberg writes:

> *In the course of our lives it becomes apparent that we are entrusted to our own hands and are to become those whom our very essence has appointed us to be. Our human substance appears before us in the darkness on whose threshold we dwell. To become a person, that is all that has any sense for us. Human personality is something mysterious.* [...] *However, the more I feel myself to be me, the more I feel myself to be a* person. *To man alone is his own being entrusted to him in this way.* [...] *Human suffering is the birth pangs of the true person. Man alone is in this sense a being that creates and suffers. Therein lie his curse and his dignity, as the great specimens of mankind clearly show. I believe that gaining a deeper understanding of inner experience, this remarkable fundamental gift of life, is the most urgent task of any philosophy that desires to share in raising empirical man to his true humanity* (Landsberg 1934a, p. 199).

For Landsberg, humanisation, 'true humanity', is a fateful event, one's fate as a person, no matter that humanisation is thinkable solely as a struggle: chiefly because man is called upon to choose freely from the plethora of available possibilities while at the same time bearing responsibility for the choice he has made, since the choice is never entirely arbitrary, but in accordance with what one is designated and called

12 Paul Ludwig Landsberg, the philosopher of Christian personalism, was born in Bonn in 1901 into the family of the Chancellor of the University of Bonn and Professor of Laws, Ernst Landsberg. He took philosophy and history at Cologne, largely as a pupil of Max Scheler, through whom he also came into contact with Edmund Husserl at Freiburg. In 1928 he became *Dozent* at Bonn with his work on the philosophy of St Augustine, but he was prevented from gaining a professorship or holding any other public office by Hitler's rise to power in 1933. A year later he successfully published his *Einführung in die philosophische Anthropologie* in Frankfurt. By that time he had a professorial position at Barcelona, and from 1936 at Santander. At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War he left for Paris, where he taught at the Sorbonne and was active in the circle around the journal *Esprit* with Jean Lacroix, Emmanuel Mounier, Pierre Klossowski and others, also publishing most of his essays and papers in it. In 1937 one of his main works, *Die Erfahrung des Todes*, was published in Lucerne, appearing in Pierre Klossowski's French translation in 1940. From 1942 he lived outside the law but, denounced by a neighbour as a French Communist, he was arrested in March of that year by the Gestapo and deported — still under his false identity, which the Gestapo failed to see through — to the Oranienburg concentration camp near Berlin, where he died of exhaustion on 2 April 1944. Since the outbreak of war he had carried a phial of poison for the event of being taken by the Gestapo. When it came to it, he realised that violence that threatens to engulf and destroy one can be resisted in other ways, and he destroyed the phial. His last work is the essay *Le problème moral du suicide* (first half of 1942), which came out after the war in *Esprit* (1946).

upon to be in relation to others. In that sense, everyone's choice is predestined. Hence man is *free* and *liable to suffer*, for his choice can never be, as Landsberg enlarges in *Réflexions sur l'engagement personnel* (Landsberg 1937), a thing of indifference. It is a response to the reality of fate and is always a process of formation. A person's life is constituted, he wrote, in particular acts, 'acts of decision' (ibid., p. 183). No matter how obvious it is that Landsberg's thinking on individual commitment is marked by the pathos of the time and his own predicament, his concept of '*engagement*' has a worth that far exceeds his own time, as is also revealed in the essay *Quelques réflexions sur l'idée chrétienne de la personne* (Landsberg 1934b) and in — his last piece — *Le problème moral du suicide* (1942). In *Réflexions sur l'engagement personnel* (1937) he writes that 'the defining value for the personalist conception is not *spontaneity* pure and simple, but *authenticity*' (Landsberg 1937, p. 184). In this interpretation *engagement* does not amount to deciding in favour of 'abstract ideologies', but for 'an imperfect cause':

> *Deciding in favour of an imperfect cause, i.e. for any one of the causes of man, is surely hard; however, the value of any commitment resides in large part in coexistence and the productive tension between the imperfection of the cause and the definitive nature of commitment* (engagement). *Awareness of the imperfection may rescue one's fidelity to the cause from the perils of fanaticism, i.e., the conviction that I possess the absolute and entire truth. It is this uneasy awareness that is the source of constant criticism aimed at perfecting the cause that I have made my own. This criticism, arising from fidelity, is, however, rather different from any criticism that judges the cause from without. It comes from within, and its intensity is a consequence of the tension between one's commitment to and the imperfection of the cause, a tension proper only to the one who has made that commitment. This suffering is, then, genuinely subjective, given that commitment is, by its very essence, an* identification *of the subject with some transsubjective historical force. Thus does each and any personal commitment carry with it both* risk *and a sacrifice that may even rise to tragedy* (ibid., p. 181–182).

Is not the commitment of Pavel Kropáček, who, at the start of the war, had ahead of him a promising career in art and aesthetics, commitment of this very kind? Why did Kropáček, a member of the Artists' Club, decide in favour of resistance, fully aware of the risk and the ultimate peril? Maybe it was because in his commitment man remains, as Landsberg writes, 'a free man, i.e., a man who is constantly liberating himself as he *humanises*. [...] For the human being, freedom is not a state; it is always in an act and it is either coming about or vanishing. Man is never simply free, and he is never indifferent vis-à-vis freedom. He abides in the problem of freedom' (ibid., p. 183). At the same time, this freedom means self-formation and self-realisation as a person. Despite every peril and the threat of annihilation.

The entire gravity and burden of freedom resides, according to Landsberg, in making a decision. But man is called upon to decide in favour of certain values that he is to implement as a person. Since the world remains imperfect, culture can never be 'the final measure' of human action. Culture can only ever be renewed through 'Don Quixotes of the mind' (Landsberg 1930, p. 314). The fact that, on the brink of war, Kropáček sets Don Quixote alongside the great heroes of European culture — as

their prototype — and its creators, speaks for itself. 'Any act of decision by a particular person,' Landsberg writes, 'is at the same time the first and last link in this immense chain. The first, because its authenticity stems immediately from creative beginnings, since it is always a personality itself that decides. And last, because it immediately gains command over all others and gives them a new meaning' (Landsberg 1937, p. 194).

Also in Kropáček's decision lies the pathos and *passion* of his life and his thinking about art. It was a decision — like Růžena Vacková's and Paul Ludwig Landsberg's — in favour of the 'extreme possibilities' of the life in amplitude of which Jan Patočka writes. The Prague philosopher exposed *himself* to these possibilities when in January 1977 he, with Václav Havel, became a spokesman for the civic human rights movement *Charter 77* in the then Czechoslovakia, of which Růžena Vacková was also one of the early signatories. However, that would be matter for a different study.

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