

# Should We Renounce Hegel? From Existentialism to Hermeneutics

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## Abstract

*Renoncer à Hegel* is the motto that defines Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics in his *Time and Narrative*. This sort of "parricide" draws the boundaries between hermeneutical rationality and Hegelian reason. Ricoeur's words capture very well how philosophical hermeneutics understood itself in the 1980s, a historical phase in which that tradition showed its fully disruptive power towards modernity. This was the case with Italian hermeneutics which, much more than its French counterpart, found a positive resonance in reflections on postmodernism. The present essay deals with some of the most relevant representatives of that debate: Luigi Pareyson, Valerio Verra, and Gianni Vattimo. The aim is to show that the chapter on Hegel is fully part of the origin and history of Italian philosophical hermeneutics, far beyond the narrow limits of early twentieth-century Hegelianism.

*Keywords:* Hegel, Pareyson, Verra, Vattimo, Existentialism, Hermeneutics.

## 1. The Origin of Hermeneutics: A Parricide

In the third volume of *Time and Narrative* (1985), Paul Ricoeur dedicates a few chapters to the "totalization of time" in fictional narrative, that is, to the particular re-configuration of the past, present, and future that a narrative is able to produce. The crucial part of the analysis has two slightly different titles in the French original and in the English translation by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer. Ricoeur chooses a title that also functions as a "watchword"<sup>1</sup> for his theoretical proposal: *Renoncer à Hegel* [*Renouncing Hegel*]. Instead, the translators opted for a problematic question: "Should we renounce Hegel?». Whichever way it is inflected, Ricoeur's reference to Hegel — as in a sort of parricide — is strategic in drawing the boundaries that separate "hermeneutical rationality" from Hegelian reason:

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1. Jérôme de Gramont, "Ricoeur. Entre paradis perdu et terre promise," *Phasis. European Journal of Philosophy* VI, 5 (2018): 117.

these boundaries are drawn along the ridge between philosophy, history and temporality. Ricoeur formulates his thesis as follows:

Intellectual honesty demands the confession that, for us, the loss of credibility the Hegelian philosophy of history has undergone has the significance of an event in thinking, concerning which we may say neither that we brought it about nor that it simply happened, and concerning which we do not know if it is indicative of a catastrophe that still is crippling us or a deliverance whose glory we dare not celebrate<sup>2</sup> — and he adds that — the leaving behind of Hegelianism [...] appears to us, after the fact, as a kind of beginning, or even as an origin.<sup>3</sup>

Ricoeur's words capture very well how philosophical hermeneutics understood itself in the 1980s, a historical phase in which, especially in some cultural contexts, that tradition showed its disruptive power towards modernity, that is, towards the line that connects Descartes to Hegel. This was the case with Italian hermeneutics, which, much more than its French counterpart, found a positive resonance in reflections on postmodernism, creating the conditions for an original path in the philosophical debates of the late twentieth century. Gianni Vattimo was the key figure in this respect. On the one hand, he reconsidered Nietzsche's and Heidegger's analyses of "Western metaphysics" and, on the other hand, he radicalized the philosophical debate on the end of modernity: these are the two lines that, crossing each other, make that philosophical period still recognizable today, thirty years later.<sup>4</sup>

However, as soon as one takes a step beyond watchwords and blurred images, one realizes that the chapter on Hegel is fully part of the origin and history of Italian philosophical hermeneutics. And this history is marked by a series of ambiguities and deviations whose most appropriate title might not be the affirmative of the French original of *Time and Narrative* but, more likely, the English translation that comes with a question mark: "Should we renounce Hegel?"

2. Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1984, 201.

3. Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 201.

4. The first pages of Vattimo's *The End of Modernity* read: "Indeed, the scattered and often incoherent theories of post-modernity only acquire rigor and philosophical credibility when seen in relation to the Nietzschean problematic of the eternal return and the Heideggerian problematic of the overcoming of metaphysics. At the same time, if Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophical intuitions are to appear once and for all irreducible to the kind of *Kulturkritik* that permeates all early twentieth-century philosophy and culture, they may do so only in relation to those things that are revealed by post-modern reflection on the new conditions of existence in the late industrial world"; see Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 15.

## 2. Reconsidering Finitude

The relationship between Hegel and Italian philosophical hermeneutics is based on the debates through which existentialism took root in Italy. Luigi Pareyson was the main protagonist of these debates, at least in the 1940s. His personalism revolves around the redefinition of the relation between the finite and the infinite, with Hegelianism as the point of polemical confrontation. As Maurizio Pagano explains in a long article that reconstructs Hegel's presence throughout Pareyson's reflection, in this initial phase, "the central points of his discussion were, on the one hand, the assertion of the value of the finite, understood as an individual or better as a person, and, on the other, a new understanding of transcendence."<sup>5</sup> A second element of rupture was then added to this focus on finitude, which Pareyson embraced in the wake of Kierkegaard and Barth, as well as through direct relationships with Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers: it was the interpretation of existentialism as a historical response to the crisis of rationalism — therefore something similar to the *event in thinking* described by Ricoeur. Referring to the immediate post-war period, Pagano explains:

If we want to open up a new path, we must first assess the path that has led society and culture to the present, and into the disaster of war. In this context, the diagnosis that emerges is that of a crisis of the past culture; and existentialism is usually referred to as "philosophy of crisis." According to Pareyson, what is on the agenda is the crisis of the rationalistic strand of modern thought, that is, of the path that goes from Descartes to Hegel. For this reason [Hegel's] thought is at the center of the crisis and of the debate that aims to overcome it.<sup>6</sup>

The step beyond the "crisis" is precisely represented by the philosophy of the person, which Pareyson systematizes in *Esistenza e persona* (*Existence and Person*, 1950). Its main axis is the incommensurability between the finite and the infinite. Contrary to contemporary versions of existentialism, the finite and the infinite here are not bound by a form of *implication*, that is, by mutual co-belonging — which Pareyson still sees as a "crypto-Hegelian residue." On the contrary, they are two unrelated elements and, on this basis, they make room for a philosophy of the finite as independent from the infinite.<sup>7</sup>

However, Pareyson's business with Hegel did not finish here. It continued underground throughout the following phase of Pareyson's thought, which dealt with aesthetics and, from there, paved the way to his philosophical

5. Maurizio Pagano, "Presenza di Hegel nel pensiero di Luigi Pareyson," *Archivio di filosofia* LXXXV, 1 (2017): 122.

6. Pagano, "Presenza di Hegel," 123.

7. Pagano, "Presenza di Hegel," 125–26.

hermeneutics. The most important stage of this period was undoubtedly manifest in the work *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (*Aesthetics: A Theory of Formativity*, 1954), in which the reference to Hegel becomes indirect and, to a large extent, implicit. The theoretical background of the book is in fact the tradition of aesthetics that starts with Benedetto Croce. In his preface to the fourth edition of the book (1988), Pareyson makes a significant remark: “Rather than lingering over an umpteenth critique of Croce’s aesthetics, this book goes straight to the point, proposing, in place of Croce’s principles of intuition and expression, an aesthetics of production and formativity.”<sup>8</sup> This sort of “interdiction against Croce” fully marks Pareyson’s “role in the Italian aesthetics of the twentieth century,” to borrow the title of an essay by Paolo D’Angelo.<sup>9</sup> Yet, when Pareyson mentions Croce, the reader knows that what he says counts as a synecdoche: it applies not only for Croce and his aesthetics but also for Hegel’s system as a whole, starting from absolute Spirit. This triangulation, which calls into question the tradition that prevailed in Italy in the first half of the twentieth century, deserves to be explored in depth because it contains fundamental elements of Pareyson’s future hermeneutical shift.

### 3. An Alternative to Hegel

In an essay entitled “Pareyson e Hegel (Pareyson and Hegel),” Mauro Bozzetti writes that Pareyson’s personalistic existentialism was above all a “resumption of the dissolution of Hegelianism”.<sup>10</sup> In other words, it amounted to breaking away from the contemporary cultural and academic context, and to doing so in a specific way — a way that, in Pareyson’s view, had historical, almost epochal, relevance. The decision not to start a polemical confrontation with Croce’s legacy confirms the significance of his proposal. In his 1988 preface, Pareyson reaffirms that his intention is to seek out new paths of thought; paths that — as stated by Francesco Tomatis — would enable him to “reinterpret and entirely reconstruct the history of contemporary philosophy and find ‘an alternative theoretical line to Hegel’”<sup>11</sup>.

This preliminary decision was radical and would underlie most of Pareyson’s philosophical hermeneutics. In his perspective, existentialism

8. Luigi Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività* (Milan: Bompiani, 1988), 7.

9. Paolo D’Angelo, “Il ruolo di Luigi Pareyson nell’estetica italiana del Novecento,” *Annuario filosofico* 27 (2011): 61.

10. Mauro Bozzetti, “Pareyson e Hegel,” in *Luigi Pareyson tra ermeneutica e ontologia della libertà*, ed. Giuseppe Riconda and Ezio Gamba (Turin: Trauben, 2010), 118.

11. Francesco Tomatis, *Pareyson. Vita, filosofia, Bibliografia* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003), 38 (emphasis mine).

did not presuppose revisions, corrections, mutilations or reversals of the Hegelian system, but a break that eliminated any complicity whatsoever with that model. So much so that, for Pareyson, nineteenth-century German existentialism itself was not yet sufficiently distanced from Hegel and had to be criticized: in fact, to Pareyson it was “anti-Hegelian and Hegelian at the same time”<sup>12</sup>, that is to say, it considered Hegel as a literally unsurpassable point of modern philosophy. In Pareyson’s personalist existentialism, instead, this shift could finally be taken to the extreme. This happened by attributing a new role to Fichte and Schelling, who are fundamental references for Pareyson’s personalism and hermeneutics. According to his perspective, Fichte and Schelling could in fact be qualified as both *pre-Hegelian* and *post-Hegelian* philosophers. This view, like Schelling’s characterization as a *post-Heideggerian* thinker that frequently recurs in Pareyson’s writings, particularly in *Esistenza e persona* and, later, in *Verità e interpretazione (Truth and Interpretation, 1971)*, was no simple provocation. The theoretically preparatory move of hermeneutics — that is, personalistic existentialism — was in fact a way to decompose and recompose the philosophical tradition. Hence, the possibility of drawing unexpected and deliberately anachronistic lines of continuity and discontinuity.

On this basis, the core of Pareyson’s existentialism lies in the thesis that the person — my finite, incarnate, and historically situated person — is not merely negativity, but a perspective that opens onto truth. The person is a concrete dialectic of opposites — finite and infinite, activity and passivity — and is the place where the universal meets history. The aesthetic theme is also embedded in this encounter. In its pre-philosophical inspiration, Pareyson’s theory of art as formativity is an appeal to look at the concreteness of the artistic experience. Despite its continuity with *Esistenza e persona*, it would be wrong to consider formativity as the *application* to aesthetics of a theoretical model elaborated elsewhere, that is, of a philosophical system presupposed for its exercise in the aesthetic field. If anything, it is the other way around: Pareyson developed his alternative to the Hegel–Croce *lignée* precisely through the *concrete* problem of artistic experience, and more markedly than in personalist existentialism. Hence, incidentally, his particularly original attention to poetics, which would return several times in the tradition started by Pareyson, for example in Gianni Vattimo. Following a typically anti-Crocean line shared with some other authors (especially Antonio Banfi and Luciano Anceschi), poetics becomes for Pareyson the effective tool with which philosophy could reasonably penetrate the concreteness of artistic practice while respecting its principles, that is, without overwriting them with extra-artistic assumptions.

12. Pareyson, *Esistenza e persona* (Genoa: il Melangolo, 2002), 78.

After all, the problem of presuppositions is not only a premise of the theory of formativity, but it is its very heart, albeit in a different sense. When, at the beginning of the section entitled “Attempt and Success,” Pareyson presented the famous definition of formativity as “such a doing that, while doing, ‘invents the way of doing,’”<sup>13</sup> he was thinking of a specific aspect of human experience exemplified by the production of artistic forms: not the production according to predetermined principles, but the formative activity that creates its own rules. Here is the point: “conceiving by performing,” that is “inventing by doing,” is the key with which Pareyson rediscovered the connection with the concreteness of artistic production. From now on, this theme would be a full part of the discussion about artistic creativity and improvisation, but for Pareyson it was above all the tool to give substance to his specific departure from Croce’s aesthetic: a departure that implied changing the entire horizon of philosophically relevant questions.

#### 4. Historicizing the Truth

Also in aesthetics, therefore, the core question for Pareyson remained that of *Esistenza e persona*, namely the role of the finite, or rather of that finite singularity that I am.<sup>14</sup> A singularity that, in *Estetica. Teoria della formatività*, finds in art-making the way to the problem of truth as interpretation. After all, the problem of truth is the common thread through which Luigi Pareyson read, disputed, and recovered Hegel in the different phases of his reflection. He did so in a key that, already in *Esistenza e persona*, attributes to philosophy some fundamental questions that touch on the problem of truth: “Does the recognition of the essential multiplicity of philosophies threaten the uniqueness of truth? Is it possible to have a pluralistic but not relativistic conception of truth? What is the point of view expressed by a perspectival position that reconciles the uniqueness of truth with the multiplicity of

13. Pareyson, *Estetica. Teoria della formatività*, 59.

14. Mauro Bozzetti insists on Pareyson’s definition of “person”: “For Pareyson the historical subject is man, for Hegel it is people, epochs, or kingdoms within which the subjects can redeem themselves only by understanding their time and making themselves understood by their time.” What is at stake in the rift between the two views is the relationship between the subjective spirit and the objective spirit. To what kind of “person” does Pareyson’s existentialism refer? It is evident that from a Hegelian point of view, Pareyson’s “person” is a notion that has not attained the objective spirit, let alone produced a synthesis of subjectivity and objectivity. It is not at all the personality of *Science of Logic*. It is not “the individual, the concrete, the subject” which is the result rather than the beginning. It is not the pure personality of which *Science of Logic* speaks: “The highest, most concentrated point is the pure personality which, solely through the absolute dialectic which is its nature, no less embraces and holds everything within itself, because it makes itself the supremely free — the simplicity which is the first immediacy and Universality,” G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), § 181I, 841.

its formulations?”<sup>15</sup> To put it more bluntly: Is it possible to think of a notion of truth as an interpretation that is historically connoted, but is not exhausted in history? As previously mentioned, this relationship between history and truth is the result of a view by which Hegelianism erases historicity in its concreteness and nineteenth-century anti-Hegelianism distorts it. However, the history of Italian hermeneutics unfolds along a time period in which the relationship with Hegel varied sometimes significantly: by the end of that period, Pareyson’s position changed to the point of being fully overturned.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, in the 1950s, the same period in which Pareyson’s existentialism moved into a non-Hegelian philosophical hermeneutics, another approach appeared, whose Italian birthplace was still Turin but whose destination became Karl Löwith’s and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Heidelberg — an environment obviously different from Jaspers’ and Pareyson’s. In this case, the key figure was Valerio Verra. Verra’s contribution to Hegelian studies in Italy is in fact inseparable from the hermeneutical perspective in which his contribution developed. And vice versa: his role in the Italian hermeneutic debate consists above all in explicitly reopening the dialogue with Hegel — that is, in embracing the objective of doing philosophy (and therefore also philosophical hermeneutics) *an und mit* Hegel, as is often mentioned.<sup>17</sup>

The distance between Pareyson and Verra can already be seen in their respective historical-philosophical texts.<sup>18</sup> As said earlier, Pareyson’s goal was to break the unitary logic of development that goes from post-Kantianism to Hegelianism. Verra instead re-attributed a decisive role to Hegel and did so — here is the intersection between history of philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics — by enhancing the dialogic dimension of dialectics.<sup>19</sup> His 1959 article titled “Rinascita Schellingiana? (A Schellingean

15. Pareyson, *Esistenza e persona*, 10.

16. The following phase of Pareyson’s reflection, which took place in the 1980s, was a chapter in its own right, and was the basis of the texts collected in *Ontologia della libertà* (*Ontology of Freedom*, 1995). This was also a fundamental moment for his relationship with Hegel, which then resumed, particularly in relation to the dialectic. Indeed, Pareyson wrote: “Hegel is right: the heart of reality is the dialectic”; however, he also wrote that “Hegel sent this great intuition in a misleading direction, falling into a catastrophic error” and the catastrophe was the *Aufhebung* of the negative by means of necessity; see L. Pareyson, *Ontologia della libertà*, Turin: Einaudi, 1995, 332. On these aspects, see once more Pagano, *Presenza di Hegel nel pensiero di Luigi Pareyson*, 129–134.

17. See for example Claudio Cesa, “Per Valerio Verra,” *Studi kantiani* XIV (2001): 177. Cesa is the editor of the posthumous collection that today is the fundamental reference text for a comprehensive overview of Verra’s Hegelian research; see Valerio Verra, “Su Hegel,” (Bologna: il Mulino, 2007).

18. Riconda, “Valerio Verra e l’ambiente filosofico torinese,” *Rivista di filosofia* XCIV, 1 (2003): 111 ff. On the distance between the “Turin philosophy” and Hegel, see also Rossi, “Alla riscoperta di Hegel,” *Rivista di filosofia* XCIV, 1 (2003): 123, with references to Guzzo and Abbagnano on one side, and to Solari and Bobbio on the other.

19. Riconda, “Valerio Verra e l’ambiente filosofico torinese”, 112.

Renaissance?") already signals the distrust that, for him, hinders the adequate understanding of Hegelian philosophy<sup>20</sup>.

Gianni Vattimo reconstructs the context in more explicit terms: for Verra, Hegel is the master "of the radical historicity of the spirit that asserts itself against every claim of metaphysical rationalism," that is, against those same claims that, conversely, Pareyson's hermeneutics faced by choosing existentialism<sup>21</sup>. From Vattimo's perspective, in short, the appeal to historicity — of knowledge, of experience, of being — is the unifying trait of the nascent Italian philosophical hermeneutics. A trait that however, perhaps paradoxically, Verra and Pareyson inflected in opposite ways with respect to Hegel: Pareyson abandoned Croce and Hegelianism altogether; Verra rediscovered Hegel and promoted a profound renewal of his early twentieth-century reception.

Yet this diversity cannot be fully understood without bringing Hans-Georg Gadamer into play. Indeed, his role was essential, and not only for the biographical circumstances that bind Verra to Heidelberg and make him the first "ambassador" of Gadamer in our country. More generally, the impact of *Truth and Method* in Italy definitely contributed to shifting the balance, and it is no coincidence that the Italian translation — signed by Vattimo himself — was one of the first to be published, in 1972. In short, the book had a remarkable and relatively rapid diffusion, whose core was precisely the theme of the historicity of truth. And there are two sides to this coin: on the one hand, by completely rewriting the problem of the objective Spirit, *Truth and Method* strengthened and sanctioned the possibility of a "different" Hegel, as posited by Verra already in the 1950s; on the other hand, its rewriting was linked to the more complex fate of hermeneutics in Italy and should be seen as a non-secondary element, especially in relation to Vattimo's thought.

## 5. Hegel and the Avantgardes

Now that Verra's position has been clarified, it is useful to shift the attention to the other side of the debate. In fact, although Vattimo claimed on several occasions that weak thought derives from Pareyson's hermeneutics, the gap between the two lines of thought has become more and more significant over the years. Their respective paths in opposite directions was progressive,

20. Valerio Verra, "Rinascita Schellinghiana?," *Il Pensiero* 4 (1959): 70–89. But at the end of the 1950s Verra's path had only just begun, and from then on the gap between him and Pareyson would widen further.

21. Gianni Vattimo, "Da Dewey a Hegel, attraverso Gadamer", *Rivista di filosofia* XCIV, 1 (2003): 130.



but unequivocal. Indeed, it can be clearly seen already in an early text like *Art's Claim to Truth* (1967), in which Pareyson's anti-Crocean aesthetic program and the opening towards Gadamer still coexist. In these pages, Vattimo follows up on the face-to-face confrontation with the Hegelian tradition on which Pareyson had chosen not to dwell. Indeed, Vattimo refers critically to the "substantively Hegelian mindset"<sup>22</sup> that appeared "dominant"<sup>23</sup> in early twentieth-century aesthetics. At the same time, however, this confrontation does not lead to a confirmation of Pareyson's position, but to a path towards the reappropriation of Hegel, albeit problematic and not univocal.

The heart of the "reappropriation of Hegel" carried out by Vattimo's hermeneutics is to be found in the theme of the end of art. The *Ende der Kunst* is precisely the pivotal point where Vattimo's position changes. Let us see how this comes about. In *Art's Claim to Truth*, Hegel is seen as largely responsible for the rhetoric of the non-essentiality of art: a shortcoming that, Vattimo objects, renders subsequent artistic forms — particularly the avantgardes — incomprehensible. Hegel was responsible, in short, for a veritable act of "violence" on art. But the attention that Vattimo paid to the avantgardes, from *Art's Claim to Truth* onwards, would also be the turning point of his interpretation of Hegel. Upon closer investigation, in Vattimo, the avantgardes eventually cease to be a phenomenon that disproves Hegel's thesis of the end of art or that simply renders the conceptual arsenal of Hegelian aesthetics irrelevant; on the contrary, they become the reaction to a complex historical scenario — a scenario that is no other than Hegel's *Ende der Kunst* — and thus do not invalidate that analysis, but instead reinforce it.

Let us have a closer look at this shift. On the one hand, *Art's Claim to Truth* considers the avantgardes and, in particular, the proliferation of manifestos as a demonstration that "Hegelian and post-Hegelian philosophy have not done justice to art"<sup>24</sup>, forcing artists to take a complex path of self-questioning and self-justification. On the other hand, however, already in the *Introduzione all'estetica di Hegel* (*Introduction to Hegel's Aesthetics*), published immediately after the 1967 volume, these phenomena are seen as the demonstration of the insuperable need for art, in a sense that is no longer anti-Hegelian, but that, on the contrary, strives for a positive retrieval of Hegel's legacy. Vattimo refers to the thesis according to which, given the necessity for the absolute idea to manifest itself in the form of sensuous appearance, (artistic) beauty is the place where this necessity is fully inscribed. Furthermore — once again in line with Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* — art is necessary because the absolute Spirit's effort to realize

22. Gianni Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 17.

23. Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 17.

24. Vattimo, *Art's Claim to Truth*, 32.

itself as full self-recognition in the other is required by its freedom. And this “need” of the Spirit finds in art something that cannot be found in philosophy: namely sensuous form, understood as the supreme form of absolute Spirit. Freedom, in short, demands to manifest itself concretely — and, at least on a first level, this concreteness cannot do without a sensuous form.

Thus, Vattimo overcomes at the same time both Pareyson’s interdiction and the Italian interpretations of the *Ende der Kunst*. This overcoming, from his point of view, is the premise for a new understanding of Hegel: an understanding in which the end of art becomes the core of a more complex framework. This can be seen clearly in his essay “The Death or Decline of Art” (1980), which is the fundamental step of Vattimo’s hermeneutics towards an authentic reappropriation of Hegel. The means of this re-appropriation are heavily reminiscent of Heidegger: the end of art, Vattimo writes, must be considered an event like those that mark the “history of Being” — in other words, it is an element that, along with many others, forms the horizon within which the history of modernity unfolds.

Whereas Pareyson speaks of a “blissful union” between Heidegger and Schelling, Vattimo suggests a union between Heidegger and Hegel. In the interplay between the survival and downfall of art, writes Vattimo, the work of art “displays characteristics analogous to Heidegger’s notion of Being: it arises only as that which at the same time withdraws from us”<sup>25</sup>. However, this proximity to Heidegger enables Vattimo to take a step further, a step which is decisive in judging whether the union between Heidegger and Hegel is also “blissful.” Vattimo’s insistence on the notion of downfall has, in fact, an ambitious objective: to bring the matter entirely back to the Heideggerian theme of *Verwindung*. What Heidegger affirms with regard to the *Verwindung* of metaphysics — as opposed to the *Überwindung*, and above all as radically irreducible to the *Aufhebung* — also applies to art. Heidegger’s *Verwindung*, recalls Vattimo, must be understood as a process of distortion of certain notions, towards a gradual distancing from metaphysics. In this sense — again, through an explicit reference to the poetics of the avant-gardes — Hegel’s end of art becomes synonymous with the «‘explosion’ of aesthetics beyond the institutional limits which are traditionally assigned to it,” which has to do with art’s capacity for profound self-transformation, problematizing its very limits. “One of the criteria for evaluation of the work of art,” writes Vattimo in relation to the avant-gardes, “seems to be, first and foremost, the ability of the work to call into question its own status”<sup>26</sup>. In short, the aspect that can least be reduced to the established canon, which

25. Gianni Vattimo, “The Death or Decline of Art,” in *The End of Modernity*, 28.

26. Gianni Vattimo, “The Death or Decline of Art,” 27.

modern art seeks to violate, becomes a power that “distorts” tradition — hence indeed a distortion of the canon, not its eradication or “overcoming.” And this distortion is often ironic, as in the case of pop art, or else expresses a radical mixture of registers, as we find in *Kitsch*. In other terms, from the avantgardes onwards, one witnesses a phenomenon of *Verwindung der Kunst* which, to Vattimo, is the most authentic sense of Hegel’s *Ende der Kunst*. But the fundamental question remains, namely, whether this “rediscovery” of Hegel by Vattimo’s hermeneutics is a faithful re-appropriation or whether, at the end of the day, greater fidelity should be found in the “renunciation” of Hegel supported by Pareyson.

English translation by S. De Sanctis