

THROUGH COMMUNICATION TO THE COMMUNITY: THE POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MARTIN BUBER'S PHILOSOPHY OF ART

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This article explores Buber's philosophy of art, correlating it with his early emphasis on individual realization, as well as his dialogical philosophy as articulated in *I and Thou* and in his theopolitical perspectives. The study posits that Buber perceives artistic creation as a conduit for communication with noumenal reality, mirroring the structure of interpersonal dialogue. Consequently, artistic creation is proposed as a blueprint for fostering an organic community or building the divine kingdom on Earth. The article integrates Adir Cohen's examination of Buber's aesthetics and Samuel Brody's theopolitical analysis, aiming to interweave these perspectives in a comprehensive interpretation of Buber's philosophy of art.

Keywords: Aesthetics – Philosophy of art – Communication – Dialogue – Politics – Anthropology

I.

Martin Buber did not develop any comprehensive philosophy of art. This is quite surprising as he was – especially during his youth – deeply interested in art. He wrote extensively about art in his early essays, especially in *Daniel* (MBW I, 183 – 245) and *Events and Encounters* (MBW I, 247 – 276).¹ His special focus on drama brought him to formulate some theoretical concepts in critical reviews and essays on dramaturgy and scenography. In his texts on fine arts, he reflected on the interaction of colours and form. He wrote several poems and dramatic fragments. With Emil Strauss, Jakob Hegner and Paul Claudel, he founded Hellerau Dramatic Union for producing performances in

¹ For the sake of simplicity, I include bibliographical references to the cited Buber texts directly in the latest edition of *Buber's Collected Writings* published by Gütersloher Verlagshaus under the abbreviation MBW, followed by the volume designation. I always give the reference where a particular text is located at the first mention of it.

Hellerau Playhouse; Buber was involved as a dramaturgist in the production of Claudel's *L'Annonce faite à Marie* at the place (Friedman 1981, 165). Furthermore, we should hardly pass over the fact that in 1904 he received a doctoral degree not only in philosophy but in *Kunstgeschichte* as well.

However, after the publication of *I and Thou* (MBW IV, 37 – 109) in 1923, his theoretical interest in art ceased, or rather it was drowned out by his other projects – dialogical philosophy and biblical studies. The traditional explanation of this *Kehre* is that his early *mystical* and more individualistic years were renounced after the crisis of the First World War in favour of the communitarian, dialogical philosophy. In accord with Israel Koren, I understand this post-war transformation not as a turn, but a shift in emphasis (Koren 2002). There is a continuum between *Daniel* and *I and Thou* that makes it possible to reconstruct Buber's philosophy of art without having to consider his early work as "surpassed" by his later one.

I want to offer such a holistic reconstruction based on the assumption that Buber's pre-war and post-war works are intrinsically related. This is, of course, an interpretive attempt building on previous efforts to explore Buber's aesthetics. I especially drew on Adir Cohen's research, in which he elaborated on the concept of the non-intentional objectivity of form (Cohen 1980). I also build on Marcia Allentuck's study in which she showed Buber's conception of productivity and creativity in art (Allentuck 1971). The rather fragmentary literature on Buber's philosophy of art includes, of course, several other contributions (Hammer 1967, Biswas 1996, Scott 2017, Atlas 2019), but none of them presents an ontology of the artwork in its complexity. My approach aims to reconstruct Buber's philosophy of art by reading his early texts with an understanding of his later development.

As Samuel Hayim Brody has shown, Buber's work is hardly aimed merely towards the problem of building community, but it involves a profound critique of power coupled with a theopolitical ideal as well (Brody 2018). Therefore, I consider it important to reconstruct Buber's philosophy of art not only in relation to his notion of dialogue, but also to his political vision.

That is why I methodologically neglect the religious dimension of the work, e.g., Buber's notion of symbol. This is not because I don't consider this aspect important – but it would unduly burden my argument given the limited space I have for it. Let this be a call to further develop Martin Buber's legacy in the philosophy of art.

II.

In his early period, Buber was strongly influenced by *Lebensphilosophie*, which he came to primarily through Friedrich Nietzsche (Mendes-Flohr 2001). Although he later downplayed this influence, it is evident in the structure and content of his seminal work

of the pre-World War I period, *Daniel* (MBW I, 183 – 246). His early texts can be read as elaborations of the theme of individuation (*Verwirklichung*) and the becoming (*Bildung*) of the man-creator (*Schöpfer*), whose thoughts and actions form a unity in necessity (*Notwendigkeit*).² In *Daniel*, he presents this theory, reflected in his interest in mysticism and art. In the latter, he locates the creative dimension of the sovereign, integrated and individuated human (“The artist as the true realizing, self-forgetful man is opposed by the self-conscious producer,” Allentuck 1971, 3).

This can be well demonstrated in Buber’s essay “Heroes” (MBW I, 257 – 261) from his volume *Events and Encounters*, written immediately after *Daniel* was published.³ He uses the work of writers Gerhart Hauptmann and Frank Wedekind to show that “the acclaimed poets of the time have forgotten their vocation” because they present heroes as “removed from the sphere of their irrational wholeness” and make them too intelligible (by placing their actions in causal or psychological contexts) (MBW I, 257 – 261). In the essay, Buber presents the hero as a type of human being who combines diversity, corporeality, and unity of experience (*Erlebnis*). “The hero is a revelation of wholeness,” Buber writes. As a “central,” i.e., coherent, united personality acting out of necessity, the hero is a measure of the human, a testament to what is in every human being. The poet is then to “reanimate the heroic miracle” or to show heroism not as an exception but as a necessity that is meant to reach and move the viewer or reader (MBW I, 260 – 261).⁴

The starting point of my reconstruction of Buber’s philosophy of art, in line with the existentialism of the early period, was, therefore, the creative act. However, it hardly has to be merely a proof of genius but to reflect the integrity and unity of the human

² The early texts I am referring to here are primarily the essays collected in the first volume of collected writings (MBW I) and the pre-war texts on art (MBW VII), which were written roughly in the period before *I and Thou* (i.e. 1900 – 1923).

³ Buber intended to write a sequel to *Daniel*, and in 1913 he even told Max Brod about his preliminary work on this book. *Events and Encounters* is a kind of sketch of a book that was never written – but it does show that Buber did not consider the theme of unification in *Daniel* to be finished and intended to develop it further (MBW I, 321 – 327). The importance of the arts in this case is considerable – in *Daniel* Buber focuses on drama, and in *Events and Encounters* on dance, poetry, and fine art. In all cases, art is for him not only an illustration of his philosophical ideas, but also to some extent a source.

⁴ In 1924, speaking about the German writer Hermann Stehr, Buber claimed that the good literature narrates the timeless: “...the event, without losing its density and reliability, becomes translucent and allows the other, the non-progressing, to be seen in its entire course. ...But the important thing is that it also teaches us anew the power from which the glory shines forth: not from the astonishing power of seclusion – it only leads to the magic of darkness – but from the far more astonishing power of love for the world, which is wonderful beyond all comprehension. The kingdom is in our midst” (MBW I, 300). This quotation vividly shows how Buber integrated mystical elements into his philosophy not in order to Platonically remove man from the world, but on the contrary to integrate them more deeply by art showing its hidden unity.

personality, including its corporality – as Buber writes in his essay on the dancer called “Brother Body” (*MBW I*, 261 – 266). Sarah Scott explains:

Artists are necessary both to model creativity and to show the people their own beauty so that they can recognize their potential. Exposure to art will train people to see with an artist’s eye, which in turn will enable them to create their own selves as works of art (Scott 2017, 116).

Unity was a prominent theme for Buber throughout his life. It can be argued (and it is a view that I am adapting in this essay) that it is unity as the acquisition of form (whether of the individual, the community, or the work of art) that is the backbone of his philosophical thought. This allows us to integrate his early work with the later. Even if Buber was interested in religion, he was so because he sought the unity of life and thought, as in the afterword of his book *Speeches and Parables of Chuang-Tse* (*MBW II*, 3, 101 – 125).⁵

Buber develops his theory of the central man until *I and Thou*, in which he shifts the centre of gravity of his interest to the “interpersonal.” However, the theme of centrality does not disappear, but rather it shifts from the human interior to the space between humans, between human and the world, between human and God, and between human and the work of art.

This “centre” should hardly be understood in an Aristotelian way; it is not an act of “second nature” corresponding to the wisdom acquired for peace and precision of action. For Buber, centrality is the concentration of all the elements of human life around the axis of the personality, as he explains in *Daniel* (*MBW I*, 183 – 191). It is the overcoming of mere “possibility” (voluntarism) to live in “necessity” where the personal desires dissolve in the precise movement of a unified personality.

This hardly means that early Buber conceived art in a pure individual manner. As he writes in *Speeches and Parables of Chuang-Tse*, the central person does not create in the sense of “innovation”; her life is marked by eternal change and unity in spirit (with others). By anchoring herself in a living tradition, she thus realizes a living community (*MBW II*, 3, 107 – 108).

Even during the “mystical” period, Buber differs from those approaches that understand the artwork as the self-expression of the artist. The process of formation has an “objective” character – it hardly expresses the inner processes or experiences of the creator because even experience (as *Erlebnis*) has its “objective” structure. It manifests the universally human, the unity of multiplicity, the necessity of action, and the principle of becoming.

⁵ Buber also published this text separately as *The Teaching of the Tao*.

Therefore, it should be hardly surprising that Buber's first dialogical statement was made during his student years, as Friedman remarks (Friedman, 333). In an essay on the Jewish impressionist painter Lesser Ury, Buber wrote: "The thing is effect [*Wirkung*], not substance. Define it, and you take away its life. The most personal rests in the relationship to the other" (*MBW VII*, 492). Ury's colouristic condensation is important for Buber because it organically integrates the depicted phenomena so they can keep their relationships. The "extra-substantiality" (*außerinhaltlich*) of art means the wholeness and unity of the work, which "can be only seen and felt, hardly discussed" (*MBW VII*, 494). Under the surface of youthful romanticism, Buber formulates the fundamental principles of his philosophy of art: *unity*, *objectivity*, and *relationality* (dialogue).

III.

After the First World War, Buber shifted the emphasis of his philosophy from the individual unifying experience to the unifying relationship. However, from his early years Buber distinguished between intuitive experience (*Erlebnis*) and the cumulative experience of the phenomenal world (*Erfahrung*), even if the specific conceptions of these concepts varied over time (Wolfson 1989). As Martina Urban remarks, this difference mirrors the structuralist distinction between *parole* and *langue*, in Buber's case, between (ecstatic) *speech* and (shared) *language* (Urban 2006, 539). The shift from individual to interhuman was a shift from speech to language as an objective form, as well.

To understand the nature of this "objectivity," we need to look at how the two "basic words" I-Thou and I-It relate to reality. Buber's epistemology was similar to Kant's in the sense that he distinguished *noumenal* and *phenomenal* truth, as Steven T. Katz has shown.⁶ The twofold appearance of the world in I-Thou and I-It relation resembles this structure of reality (Katz 1983, 1 – 51). But for Buber, this twofoldness "is a way of relating and not an act of judgment in consciousness, as in Kant" (Perlman 1990, 98). As Lawrence Perlman argues in his critique of Katz's essay, Buber and Kant differ. Buber rejects the idea "that relation is a form of knowledge via self-appropriation and therefore of construction" because "[t]here are no laws of understanding which provide objective connections in consciousness" (*ibidem*). Yet, as Katz explains in his reply to Perlman, the structural difference between *noumenal* and *phenomenal* reality correlates with two basic words I-Thou and I-It and their respective epistemology.

This neo-Kantian structure is evident in Buber's early theatre criticism. In *The Three Novelli's Roles* (*MBW VII*, 418 – 424), he presents an idea that acting can be done

⁶ Sarah Scott, among others, emphasises the fruitfulness of employing the Kantian point of view for interpreting Buber (Scott 2017, 113).

in a twofold manner: the *expressionist* (*Ausdruck*) acting is based on skilful observation, recording and imitation of the movements; acting as a *statement* (*Außerung*) is based on the inner character and the corresponding system of its necessary manifestations (*MBW VII*, 418 – 424). This dichotomy corresponds exactly to the anthropology presented in the essay *Daniel* – the noumenal can only be achieved through a unified personality or an inner transformation leading to the full development of the personality. Everything “accidental” is eliminated; man acts in accordance with being.

Buber conceives of the epistemology of the noumenal differently in his mature philosophy. In his text “On Man and His Image-Work” (*MBW XII*, 449 – 463) written in 1955, he employs a small letter “x” to denote noumenal reality, which can be reached via a kind of “dialogical epoché.” The principle is as follows.

Sensual perception transforms phenomena into categories – objects. Therefore, when the person tries to grasp the subject of perception in its independence, the object is transformed into a non-object. Buber explains that it becomes a communication partner (we have no knowledge about it, we must ask it). This non-object – *x* – liberated from all the sensual attributes which the person perceives (Kantian “an sich”) is impossible to imagine. However, this *x* is precisely what makes any sensual encounter possible: “[f]or in all the world of the senses there is not a single trait that does not stem from encounters, that does not derive from the participation of the *x* in the encounter” (*MBW XII*, 456).

In the following story about an encounter with a linden tree he presents how the process of this “dialogical epoché” works:

the linden waited for me to green itself, so nature, the unperceived, the *x*-nature, formerly waited for living beings to arise, through whose encountering perception the green, the soft, the warm, the sense-conditioned qualities come into the world (*MBW XII*, 457).⁷

Buber claims that the artist has just such an encounter with *x*, based on which he forms the work. Although the necessity of the unity of the artist’s personality as a condition of creation is not denied here, the key is the dialogue with *x*. The artist has access to noumenal reality because he leaves the world as objects and approaches it as a partner. Buber shifts the emphasis – from the individual to what emerges in communication.

As Urban implies, this can be understood as the shift from an ecstatic speech overriding the social context towards language as the collective instrument of communication. In this, the position of the ecstatic artist is different from the person

⁷ It is noteworthy how extensively Buber uses natural phenomena to explain his dialogical principles – this emphasises that the dialogical partner can be any part of the world we inhabit.

who shapes her work based on a dialogue with the object of her interest rather than relying on immediate intuition. After his *Kehre*, Buber abandons the quite solipsist Nietzschean conception of the artist as a sovereign author and replaces it with more dialogical and communal point of view. At the same time, this shift corresponds to a shift in emphasis from immediate experience (*Erlebnis*) to the long-term groping and shaping of form (*Erfahrung*).

IV.

If art is hardly a self-expression, a record of sensual perception or a mere imitation, what is it? As Adir Cohen explains, Buber conceives art from a twofold point of view: a) it is the result of the artist's encounter with a form, and b) the artist realizes the latent form (Cohen 1980). In both cases the artist dwells in solitude, although she is not carrying out her own unity in her acts, but she is in an active relation to some object – the *noumenal* reality is grasped as a partner in communication, as Buber explains in *I and Thou*:

That is the eternal origin of art, that a human being is confronted with form which desires to become a work through him. It is not an outgrowth of his soul, but an apparition that approaches it and demands the active power from it. It depends on an act of being on the part of the human being: if he performs it, if he speaks the basic word with his being to the appearing form then the active power flows, the work comes into being (*MBW IV*, 43).

An artistic creation is hardly *creation ex nihilo* or copying reality; it is an outcome of the experience (*Erfahrung*) with "the other." The *noumenal* reality is presented in a latent form which is "delivered" by the artist, not as it is in Plato's *Ion* from gods or in an ecstatic act as in early Buber's years: "The structure does not stand in a world of gods, but in this great world of human beings. It is indeed 'there,' even if no human eye visits it; but it sleeps" (*MBW IV*, 61). This is why it is a distinctly Gestalt conception, rather than an existential one (which would correspond to Buber's pre-war thinking).

But the dialogical character of art hardly involves only an artist; the perception of the artwork by a spectator is dialogical as well. In *Zwiesprache* (*MBW IV*, 112 – 150) Buber writes:

all art is essentially dialogical from its origin: ...all music calls to an ear that is not the musician's own, all painting to an eye that is not the painter's own, architecture also to a step that modifies the building, and...they all tell the recipient something that can only be said in this one language (not a "feeling," but a perceived secret)... (*MBW IV*, 136).

The artwork itself can therefore be understood as *an event* rather than *an artefact*; an event of form, which is, on the one hand, an event of the artist's encounter with form, on the other hand an encounter of the viewer with the form modelled by the artist; it follows, among other things, that in Buber's conception the artwork is not an event of the viewer's encounter with the artist.

Adir Cohen proposes to conceive of this as *a non-intentional objectivity of form* that is not personal – the creative act requires a) partnership, and b) a relationship of reciprocity (Cohen 1980, 60). In this, the artist repeats the creative act, or allows noumenal reality to become phenomenal – and she is reflected in her work (as I will show below), but only to the extent that the pre-arranged form allows.

At first sight, this *objectivity* of form may remind us of Plato's discussion of artistic inspiration in *Ion*. But there is a fundamental – ontological – difference between Plato and Buber. For the latter, there is no universally valid space of *ideas* or "ideal objects," only particular experience (*Erfahrung*) in a relation.

As Evyatar Varman explains, Buber hardly shares Plato's concept of an independent mind, but rather he conceives the human being as a bodily being connected to this primal reality via the relationship between child (I) and mother (Thou) (Varman 2023). Hammer writes: "Art, in Buber's view, rather than being a matter merely of the symbolic function, is a basic capacity for meeting the world" (Hammer 1967, 6).

In his speech on Helmar Lerski (see "Rede zur Eröffnung der Ausstellung im 'Bezalel,'" *MBW VII*, 505 – 507), a pioneer of modern photography known for his significant work with light and shadow contrasts, Buber underscores that the photographer does not create the object through light manipulation. Rather, the photographer serves as a witness to the phenomenon's emergence, using light to help us "see" things, not "produce" them (*MBW VII*, 505).

To illustrate this point, Lerski's *Metamorphosis* serves as an enlightening example. This photographic series, depicting the same face in various lights, demonstrates how light can reveal different aspects of a single object. As Buber points out, the play of light unearths a myriad of "secret possibilities that rest behind the factuality of the face" (*ibidem*). Here, the artist does not unveil the object's essence but unravels connections to diverse human forms, arguably even *archetypes*.

The absence of an "object to imitate" is of crucial importance. The objectivity of the artwork lies in the intricate network of connections and the wholeness of facets tied to the experience of other humans. This complexity forms the essence of the artist's "birth-giving" to the object; it allows the object to resonate with humanity in its entirety through its distinctiveness and presence.

For Buber, the objectivity of the dialogical partner is based on the unavoidable material – the sensual relation between I and You. In “On Man and His Image-Work” he writes:

Even when I walk in the desert and nowhere does a form present itself to my eye, even when a striking noise hits my ear, binding and limiting, linking and rhythmising, the becoming of a shaped unity still takes place in my perception. The truer, the more existentially reliable it is, the more the observation is transformed into a viewpoint in all areas of the senses. Looking is figurative fidelity to the unknown, which does its work in cooperation with it. It is fidelity not to the appearance, but to being – the inaccessible with which we deal (*MBW XII*, 457).

That is how the form is dependent both on the perceiver and the x-object so that both impress themselves on the object – the perceived partner. This is the mechanism of the “between” (*das Zwischenmenschliche*), which is for Buber the fundament of both interpersonal dialogue and community (*MBW IV*, 212 – 228). In every true creation of a form (e.g. in art) humans reiterate the dialogical process of interpersonal communication *and* the constitutive principle of community. That is what Buber understands as the *encounter*.

V.

The artwork is not merely an encounter with form but also an interaction with the world, brought to life by the form. It further extends to the act of recreation and the communal character of form engaging other individuals. Despite the solitary nature of the artistic process, the artist does not create “of herself.” As Buber’s analysis of the photographic series indicates, the very presence of an archetypal level implies that the artist creates within a particular culture, and she draw the archetypal structure from the unity of spirit and life (Cohen 1980).

Buber replicates the traditional German distinction between civilization and culture, wherein he defines culture as the national or social “spirit” that is manifested as a life system. He articulates this idea in the statement, “[t]he common shaping of a society that comes from the pairing of the communal spirit and the communal life of the same society, this is culture” (*MBW XI*, 2, 52). Thus, his perspective underscores that the artist creates from within the intricate matrix of this communal spirit and life.

In the essay “On the Nature of Culture” (*MBW XI*, 2, 42 – 58), Buber suggests that in “disjointed” historical eras like the Renaissance, artwork was removed from the “spiritual” context of the culture, transforming it into an early capitalist enterprise’s technical problem (*MBW XI*, 2, 46).

Although discussing the Renaissance, he alludes to an issue he later regrettably does not explore further – the dilemma of artistic creation in modern times and under capitalism. According to Buber, our socio-economical system disrupts the dialogical relationship by mechanization and commodification of the artistic creation, dissolving social and interpersonal relations and reshaping reality based on rationalization and economic efficiency.

Furthermore, Buber does not suggest how art can overcome these conditions, for instance, by employing the strategies of cooperative artistic communities over highly bureaucratized institutions such as art colleges or large theatres.

As Buber explains, artistic creation is a cultural activity, a manifestation of the artist's life system. Under the disjointed conditions, artistic creation is void; the creative instinct alone does not fulfil the creator's authentic existence (Cohen 1980, 60 – 61). As Cohen states, an individual artist may not create culture, but her work embodies a non-intentional objectivity of form that encapsulates the spirit of culture as a life system. Is this kind of artwork possible under conditions of highly rationalized capitalist production?

The authentic artists embody a dual community – by adopting a social stance towards the world and by embedding themselves and their culture, as a life system, into their work. As Allentuck remarks, Buber considers “aesthetic understanding” a prerequisite for any true human relation (Allentuck 1971, 4). Hence, the artist creates the potential for individuals to connect through the work, because the culture that facilitated its creation unites them. Regardless of the conditions under which this is possible, for Buber, artistic creation itself represents the possibility of overcoming the social crisis. That is why art was a crucial component of Buber's cultural Zionism (Schmidt 2003). Consequently, we arrive at the pivotal query – the political significance of artistic creation.

VI.

In my introduction I mentioned the fact that despite Buber's intense interest in art, both theoretically and practically, this interest is rather neglected. The situation is similar with his political thought, as Brody has shown (Brody 2017, 2). I suggest that part of the suppression of the political dimension of Buber's work was due to the advent of neoliberalism and its incorporation of dialogical thought, which depoliticized a potentially subversive (socialist) theory into one that would fit the liberal ethos of laissez-faire capitalism (Brody 2017, 4). At this point, we have no definitive theory of Buber's conception of art or his politics, as Brody admits.

For Buber, of course, the most important project was that of the community (*Gemeinschaft*), which differs from society (*Gesellschaft*) in its emphasis on organic

ordering as opposed to mechanical ordering (mass society). This idea combines with the concept of the kingdom of God to form a specific complex, *theopolitics*. This is why Brody can bluntly claim, “The telos of Buber’s scholarship was theopolitics.” After all, *I and Thou* was intended as the first volume of a series of comparative studies on religion culminating in a political essay (Brody 2017, 8).

Theopolitics is of course related to Buber’s cultural Zionism. In “The Holy Way” (*MBW XI*, 1, 125 – 156), which is probably the most “anarchistic” political writing (Brody 2017, 41), he sets out the goal for the Jewish people: to realize the divine in man in creating a “real community” (*der wahren Gemeinschaft*). Buber emphasizes that this is an all-human ideal, and the political concept is not intended for Jews alone (*MBW XI*, 1, 127).

Here Buber clearly presents his key idea of the unity of spirit and life and criticizes the Jews for embracing “European dualism” – thus depriving themselves of the authentic heritage of Judaism, which Buber considers to be “the tendency toward realization” (*die Tendenz der Verwirklichung*) (*MBW XI*, 1, 129). *Verwirklichung* appears frequently in *Daniel* and signifies, among other things, the realization of personality, but also the realization of a form. In the article “Revolution and Us” (*MBW XI*, 1, 108 – 110), published in 1918 in *Der Jude*, Buber commented on the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, arguing that without the Jewish element, social change could not happen. For him, Jews are the authentic bearers of the “organic creative instinct,” or the desire to express the absolute empirically (*MBW XI*, 1, 108). From this point of view, realization (*Verwirklichung*) must be understood as both a political and a national ideal. It allowed Buber to graft his own cultural Zionist politics onto a broader humanist project, while at the same time connecting it to his anthropology and applying it to thinking about art.

In “The Holy Way,” Buber presents the idea of an organic political order in the following way – the realization of the person manifests the divinity in her, but it only reaches its fullness if people open to each other and actively communicate (here the dialogical principle is evident).

In communication, “in-between” people the “eternal substance arises,” or the divine is realized in the community between human beings (*MBW XI*, 1, 130). Buber’s emphasis is on deeds, not on theology or religious dogma. He directly draws an analogy between the realization of the idea, the work of art and the polis, thus showing that the process of formation or creation is only one – here again the idea of the human-creator (*Schöpfer*) appears, who fulfils her divinity in a coherent action (*MBW XI*, 1, 134).

This dialogical process of “searching for the form of community” is of course analogous to what I have described as a work of art. Buber’s political vision is “artistic” in the sense that a cooperating humanity, through the “interpersonal” that emerges in

dialogue, moves closer to the pre-arranged form – the divine intention, which is the kingdom of God. There is an analogy in the divine act of creation, whereby if the artist creates out of the fullness of her personality rooted in a given community, then she lives out of culture and participates in its creation (Cohen 1980, 61 – 63).

I understand Buber's philosophy of art to have an implicit telos, a purposefulness toward which artistic creation must strive in order to fulfil its potential: it is the unification of spirit with life. The work of art "desires" to be completed by the spectator because the form that the artist arrives at has, as I have explained, the nature of a non-intentional objectivity (Cohen 1980, 66). Under the hands of the artist, an "objective" form is created that can become a "partner" in dialogue with anyone who shares the culture in question. Therefore, the artist who dialogically shapes her work in the unity of spirit and life (i.e., the artist who transcends her individuality with a communal focus) is directly involved in the construction of an ideal society that is possible only as a *Lebenssystem*.

In "Man and His Image-Work," Buber explains in a Kantian manner that the work of art, by its structure, expresses man's adequate attitude towards the world. In order to create a form, the artist must find the right relationship between spirit and world, between the *substantia humana* and the *substantia rerum* (*MBW XII*, 463). Thus, an artist does not have to be politically engaged and yet can create works that are exclusively political; on the contrary, engagement in the sense of partisanship or propaganda would, in Buber's conception, devalue the work. For Buber, the artwork is political as it is isomorphic both to the ideal communication and creative deed.

VII.

I have tried to show how Buber's philosophy of art can be reconstructed and at the same time demonstrate the internal unity of his work despite the "shift of emphasis" in his thought after the First World War.⁸ If I were to summarize this philosophy as a certain model of thought (which of course is inadequate to Buber's philosophical project, which does not aspire to a "system"), I would sketch the outlines of such a philosophy of art as follows.

Art-making is a process of realizing a form that exists in its latency as a partner for the dialogical relationship of the artist. The resulting shape includes both the noumenal reality with which the artist must enter into dialogue and the imprint of her own personality and, consequently, the culture she carries within herself. The work is thus not a self-expression of the artist, although this latent form cannot be realized except through concrete human experience (*Erfahrung*), that is, a long-term search for the unity of form, which has the nature of non-intentional objectivity.

⁸ "Levinas is correct that Buber never leaves behind his basic aesthetic orientation" (Scott 2017, 112).

Art is communication, and the work of art can thus be understood as an event of encounter in several senses – firstly, as a dialogue between the artist and the form; secondly, as a dialogue between the viewer and the work of art; and thirdly, as the union of spirit and life in culture as a life system. The last point is made possible by the fact that, in its objectivity and non-intentionality, the work of art unites the spiritual and the material spheres and is accessible to all; like a “magnet” it thus binds the people who experience it to itself and penetrates them both as a model of the creative act and as an expression of the cultural life into which the authentic work enters. This is why artistic creation, when it is realized according to this ideal, has political significance.

In a free society of equal individuals, who create an organic society by communicating with each other, art is a structural model of the unity of form and the articulation of the dialogical culture of that society. In all these moments, a human’s divinity is realized. Therefore, the artistic creation is a kind of a religious activity as well. If the form of a work of art has an “objective” nature, it is not because it is supposed to “depict” the world, but to give space for man to live in unity with the world and God. This is the remarkable legacy of Buber’s philosophy of art.

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