

Karsten Harries

Why Art Matters
The China Lectures

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Preface

A preface is usually written after a text has been completed. For that reason it often functions more as an epilogue than an introduction. This certainly can be said of this preface: when I wrote these four lectures I had not visited China, did not know what awaited me, and wondered whether my audience would find much of relevance in my attempt to show why art matters, given what would seem to be the much more pressing problems we face, including global warming, a deteriorating environment, the growing disregard for the value of human life, fed both by greed and false religion. Why does art matter?

I chose this topic in response to an invitation by Professor Wang Tangjia, which gave me a welcome opportunity to draw together some of my thoughts about our continued need for art, even as the age we live in would seem to render these untimely reflections, “untimely” in the sense of Nietzsche’s *Untimely Meditations*: “untimely” because quite out of step with the spirit of our now global, post-technological, media-driven culture, which makes it difficult to attribute a very significant role to art. What place does art still have in the world of today?

A first answer is hinted at by an old story told by Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi) that I encountered long ago in Werner Heisenberg’s *Das Naturbild der heutigen Physik*.¹ Heisenberg cites it to express his concern that our technology, instead of remaining just a tool to help us live more fully human lives, might become second nature in a way that would rob us of our humanity. That concern has remained with me and colors these four lectures, which are not only about art, but also about the need to recognize both the legitimacy and the limits of the understanding of reality that is a presupposition of our science and technology. And as that concern has remained with me, so has this story told two and a half millennia ago by Chuang Tzu:

Tzu-kung traveled south to Ch’u, and on his way back through Chin, as he passed along the south bank of the Han, he saw an old man preparing his fields for planting. He had hollowed out an opening by

¹ Werner Heisenberg, *Das Naturbild der heutigen Physik* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1955), pp. 15-16.

which he entered the well and from which he emerged, lugging a pitcher, which he carried out to water the fields. Grunting and puffing, he used up a great deal of energy and produced very little result.

"There is a machine for this sort of thing," said Tzu-kung. "In one day it can water a hundred fields, demanding very little effort, and producing excellent results. Wouldn't you like one?"

The gardener raised his head and looked at Tzu-kung. "How does it work?"

"It's a contraption made by shaping a piece of wood. The back end is heavy and the front end light and it raises the water as though it were pouring it out, so fast that it seems to boil right over! It's called a well sweep."

The gardener flushed with anger and then said with a laugh, "I've heard my teacher say, where there are machines, there are bound to be machine worries; where there are machine worries, there are bound to be machine hearts. With a machine heart in your breast, you've spoiled what was pure and simple; and without the pure and simple, the life of the spirit knows no rest. Where the life of the spirit knows no rest, the Way (Tao) will cease to buoy you up. It's not that I don't know about your machine — I would be ashamed to use it!"²

For Heisenberg the story had lost nothing of its relevance: restlessness of the spirit, he suggested, "is perhaps one of the most fitting descriptions we can give of the state of human beings in our present crisis."³ Today's world makes it impossible for us not to have "machine worries." And the old gardener was right: "where there are machine worries, there are bound to be machine hearts." It is such worries that gave rise to these lectures, in which I argue that we need art to help prevent the instrumental reason that rules the world of machines from ruling us human beings, too, in a way that would transform hearts into machines.

² *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Burton Watson "Heaven and Earth," trans. B (New York: Columbia Press, 1968). Watson translation available online: <http://www.coldbacon.com/chuang/chuang.html>

³ Heisenberg, p. 16

This is, to be sure, a very old story reflecting a very different way of life. “Technology, the machine has spread over the world to an extent of which the Chinese sage could have no idea. But notwithstanding that development, even two thousand years later the most beautiful works of art were still being created and that simplicity of soul, of which the philosopher speaks, was never quite lost, but in the course of the centuries manifested itself, sometimes more weakly, sometimes more strongly, and bore fruit.”⁴ And is Heisenberg not right: must we not learn to let the wisdom of the Chinese sage coexist with the machine? Would we not be altogether irresponsible were we to follow the example of Chuang Tzu’s old gardener today? Countless problems demand that we embrace what he would have us reject. To suggest that we should turn our back on technology is to refuse to face the problems of our day. We need more and still better technology. To be sure, we must use it responsibly.

But, as the fact that Heisenberg thinks it important for us to listen to this story suggests, the more deeply we understand the presuppositions of the scientific world picture, the more difficult it becomes to simply dismiss the old gardener’s concerns. Nor should we take comfort in and give no further thought to the millennia-old coexistence of simplicity of thought and machine technology invoked by the physicist.

Even if this is granted — and I am aware that I shall have to say more to show just what is at issue, is my suggestion that we look to art for help not rendered utopian by the current state of art and of the art-world, which makes talk of “simplicity of soul” seem ridiculously out of date. Does today’s art production not support rather those who, like the philosopher Arthur Danto, claim that there is a sense in which art can be said to have ended. Danto does not consider this a disaster, but rather welcomes it as a liberation from a particular narrative or dogma that had long presided over the progress of art. Art is free today as never before, free to pursue art for whatever reason an artist chooses to embrace, where such freedom is shadowed by the specter of arbitrariness. Has art not become unbearably light? This question presupposes that the thesis that art has come to an end cannot mean that art is no longer being produced. Danto was certainly not

⁴ Ibid.

“claiming that art had stopped or that it was going to stop, but only that in whatever way it was going to go on, that would be consistent with its having come to an end.”⁵

Danto is well aware that he is not the first thinker to have proclaimed the end of art. Already in the 1820's Hegel had lectured in Berlin that for us heirs of the Enlightenment art can no longer have the importance that it possessed in countless primitive cultures, that it still possessed in ancient Greece and the religious Middle Ages: what art has lost is what was once its highest function, which allowed it to be experienced and pursued, preceding religion and philosophy, as a privileged way of articulating what most profoundly matters to us human beings. And that loss, Hegel insisted, should not be mourned, but welcomed as the inevitable consequence of the progress of the human spirit, of humanity's finally coming of age.

The first of these four lectures, *The End of Art?* shows how difficult it is to get around claims that art in what was once its highest sense has indeed come to an end, how the very shape of our modern world, including today's art world, supports such claims, even as the question mark in the title suggests that I find the claim that art has come to an end questionable — but questionable precisely because enough can be cited in its support to make it important to question it.

The second lecture, *Art in the Age of the Decorated Shed*, returns to the question: what does art matter in our modern world? The title already hints at an answer: it invites you to look at our age in the image of the decorated sheds that have become its most characteristic architectural expression (just think of modern Shanghai), where the very need to dress up functional sheds aesthetically speaks to the insufficiency of any purely functional architecture — where it does not matter whether we are thinking of applied decoration or of skyscrapers given the look of mega-sculptures. And does today's architecture not provide us with a key to the continued significance of art in general and perhaps of all cultural production? Do we not need to add an aesthetic supplement to what instrumental reason would have us produce to compensate us for a life

⁵ Arthur C. Danto, *Encounters and Reflections. Art in the Historical Present* (Noonday Press, Farrar Straus Giroux: New York, 1990), p. 334.

impoverished by that machine spirit Chuang Tzu's old gardener refused to admit into his life? Was Nietzsche not right to claim in *The Birth of Tragedy* that we experience our lives and our world as justified only when these are represented as aesthetic phenomena?

But aesthetic production is a poor guardian of our humanity. So understood decoration and art can cover up the distressing muteness of the environment created by technology with beautiful masks, but they lack the power to return us to the Way which alone, according to the old gardener, can grant rest to our spirit. Attempting to sketch at least the beginning of an alternative, this lecture thus turns to Heidegger's inquiry into the origin of the work of art: here we find a thoughtful challenge to Hegel's thesis that helps to make clearer why it is just in this age of technology that we need art to help us save our humanity.

What Heidegger has to tell us, however, is shadowed by his, and not only his, politicizing of art and aestheticizing of politics. The third lecture, *The Golden Calf*, addresses this shadow and challenge. Both, the politicizing of art and the aestheticizing of politics, remain temptations that demand a critical response. The shadow cast by National Socialism threatens thus to envelop Heidegger's thinking on art so completely that it becomes difficult for us to take seriously his challenge to Hegel. Does any attempt to recover for art today what long ago was its highest function not endow it with a pseudo-religious significance that reduces art to a version of the golden calf? Or, we can say, that lets it become kitsch, a useful aesthetic category that emerged in Munich in the second half of the 19th century and continues to shed light, not only on modern art production, but also on modern politics and modern religion.

But if we do indeed need art to help us save our humanity and this need is met neither by art for art's sake, nor by decorating the houses that the objectifying reason presiding over our science and technology has built for us, nor by the raising of golden calves, where are we to turn?

The final lecture, *Why Art Matters*, sketches at least some considerations in support of that claim. Buried in these considerations are some pointers about the way that I would have art, and not only art but society, take.

Writing these lectures for a Chinese audience, I was very much aware of the way my thinking remains rooted in my personal history: how it was shaped by decisive early years spent in a Germany that with all its dark and bright sides, despite, or perhaps because of the all too human proximity of barbarism and enlightenment, remains my spiritual home; shaped also by the many good years I have spent in the United States, studying, teaching, raising a family, but increasingly worried about our in the long or perhaps not so long run unsustainable way of life. I wonder whether we will be able, or rather willing, to care for this earth, which, despite journeys to the moon, remains the only home that we shall ever have, care for it sufficiently to leave to future generations the kind of environment, the kind of earth, air, and water that will support a life worth living. In my first lecture I thus pointed out that one thing I had hoped to find here in China were “at least some traces pointing to a future that would see human beings embrace modernity without becoming its victim, master technology without allowing technological thinking and its instrumentalization of all it embraces to crush our humanity.”

I write this preface having spent four all too short weeks in China. The rapid urbanization of the country, in evidence just about everywhere I traveled, exceeded all expectations and offered countless illustrations supporting what I have to say about the built environment in these lectures, especially the second. Evident also were the problems that inevitably attend that process, including its impact on the environment, where the quality of the air is perhaps the first thing a tourist is likely to notice.

Did I find those traces pointing towards a future that would allow the gifts of technology and the old gardener’s simplicity of soul to coexist? I answer with a hesitant “yes,” hesitant because four weeks are an all too short time to be more confident.

Not that I found these traces in the art I saw: indeed, I did not see works by any of the serious artists working in China today, some of whom have earned their reputation as prominent members of today’s global art world. Given what I have seen of their work in this country, many of the concerns expressed in the first chapter would seem to apply to their work, too. And I certainly did not find such traces in the seemingly ubiquitous kitsch, so obviously aimed at tourists.

But I did find such a trace in I. M. Pei's recently completed Suzhou Museum, which succeeds not only in providing some of the treasures of that city's glorious past with a modern frame, but succeeds in engaging the courtyards and gardens that are such a distinctive part of Suzhou's history in a moving conversation. Especially instructive was a morning spent first in the nearby Lions Grove Garden, with its wonderful stones from Taihu Lake, in which the architect once spent three summers when the garden still belonged to his grandfather, then followed by some hours spent in the museum. That morning helped me understand how a distinctly modern, forward-looking architecture can be at the same time a re-presentation of what makes the Lions Grove Garden such a good place to linger in. We, and especially the architects among us, have more to learn from Pei's relatively modest museum than from Shanghai's Jin Mao Tower: about the way buildings should relate to earth, water, and sky; about the need for a human scale; about how a building can be open both to the past and to the future.

And, speaking of the Lions Grove Garden, I did discover traces of what I hoped to find in China in the many gardens my wife and I visited, and not just the great historical gardens in Suzhou and elsewhere, which with their rocks and plants, fish and birds, bridges, pavilions, and courtyards, insert into the urban fabric re-presentations of nature with its mountains and water, allowing the spirit to come to rest. It was on the campus of Fudan University that we first stepped into such a garden. But we encountered such gardens everywhere, including the hotels we stayed in. Even Pudong's ultra-modern Century Avenue, which opens to the immense green expanse of Century Park, makes room on its wide sidewalk with its camphor and ginkgo trees for gardens that invite one to forget the traffic and bustling Shanghai. In the midst of the city the city is far away. China's gardens can teach us that those eighteenth century thinkers were right who considered gardening a major art, as important today as architecture, which loses its soul whenever it turns its back on its more modest sister. Gardening matters.

And I found such a trace on the yellow mountains of Huangshan. I am thinking here not so much of the magnificent mountain scenery, so often represented in Chinese poetry, painting, and gardens, as of the absence of trash, despite the many thousands of tourists who daily walk its paths, of the workers who help to keep these paths clean. Keeping a landscape clean is also a way of representing it that communicates care for this

earth. Today such care matters more than ever before. And wherever we went, we found signs of such care. Keeping the earth and its ponds, lakes, and rivers free of trash is also an activity that possesses an aesthetic significance that deserves more consideration than it has received. It is of course true that just because the standard of living is much higher in the United States than in China, we should expect the same of its trash production, while wages are simply too high in this country to employ the many people necessary to keep China so clean. Should what I welcome here as a trace pointing towards a more truly humane existence not be understood rather as just a function of a lower standard of living?

But we must not simply take for granted that what we commonly understand by "a high standard of living" translates into "a high quality of life." How important are mobility and stability? How important is it to be able to enjoy the outdoors, to see a tree sprouting its first green in spring, to actually dig in the earth without the help of some machine, to garden? And how important is a sense of community? What sort of community? Is it important to our spiritual wellbeing that this be an ongoing community that stretches from the distant past into an inevitably uncertain future?

A third and perhaps the most important trace of what I hoped to find was furnished by the people I met, who seemed more aware of others, less pushy, more relaxed than what I had become used to. Some will claim that this, too, will change as China embraces the global economy and all it entails. Money and selfishness will rule here, too. And perhaps they will. But if so, China, too, will have paid for a higher standard of living with a deteriorating quality of life. As Heisenberg saw so clearly, just today we all need to listen to Chuang Tzu's old gardener.

I spoke of the people I have met, some of whom I would now like to thank, first of all the members of Fudan University's philosophy department who immediately made my wife and me feel welcome and almost at home. Special thanks go to Professor Wang Tangjia, who extended the invitation that brought me to China and proved a delightful host and interlocutor, to Professor Zhang Shuangli, whose work on Ernst Bloch had prepared her well for what I had to say and who could always be counted on for a challenging question, and to Professor Sun Xiangchen, who had visited Yale four years

ago and now helped us to see and understand what makes Fudan University such a remarkable institution. And last, but not least, I would like to thank Zhang Qifeng, who met us at the Shanghai airport, made sure that we would not get lost, proved a superb guide, and gave us some insight into what it was like to be a graduate student in philosophy at this University.

I said that a trace of what I hoped to find in China was furnished by the people I met. That certainly includes those many faculty members and students, who not only listened to my lectures, but with their questions and comments demonstrated that what I had to say was understood and did not seem altogether irrelevant to their concerns. They will help shape the China of tomorrow and deserve my special thanks.

1. The End of Art?

1

Contemplating my impending trip to China, I became all too aware of how steeped my own thinking is in my German and American past, how rooted it is in a profoundly ambiguous history that has helped make me the person I am today, that has shaped my values and also my fears, haunted as this history is by the specter of a never before known inhumanity. But it is not just my personal history, which begins with childhood memories of the burning Berlin, of bombs and National Socialist rule, which seems to me haunted by this specter, but also our in many ways so promising modern world. The world we live in owes much that is best about it to the Enlightenment, to its faith in reason and to its ability to make us humans, as Descartes put it, the masters and possessors of nature, promising to help us solve all the important problems of life and, with the help of an ever advancing technology, lead us towards a mode of existence, where our desire for both happiness and freedom would finally be satisfied: paradise finally realized on the basis of technology. Today this inheritance of the Enlightenment no longer belongs just to the West, but has embraced the globe, as the architecture of Shanghai demonstrates. The striking World Financial Center by Kohn Pedersen Fox, e.g., to be completed here in Shanghai in 2008 with a distinctive rectangular hole at the top, promises to look like an outsized sculpture that could stand in just about any world metropolis, spiritually mobile in its essence, even if materially bound to this particular place. Technological advances, aesthetic taste, and the global economy come together here in a way that places us on the threshold of a wonderful transnational global culture.

But why does the prospect of this culture not simply fill me with joy? A first answer is suggested by the way dreams of paradise realized with the help of technology are colliding today with the ever more evident scarcity of resources needed to realize such dreams. Humanity can no longer afford to exploit the earth as it has done with relative impunity for millennia. A second and perhaps more weighty answer is suggested by the millions that, notwithstanding often reiterated commitments to the dignity of every human being, have been murdered, killed, or just been allowed to suffer and perish, often scarcely noticed, in the past century. Dreams of paradise realized on the basis of

technology thus remain haunted by the specter of an inhumanity of which reason alone cannot rid us. Needed is a respect for both, human beings and the natural, that is not easily reconciled with the Cartesian promise that reason alone will render us the masters and possessors of nature, including our own human nature, a promise that has presided over the progress of modernity.

Given such concerns it is hardly surprising that one thing I hope to find here in China is at least some traces pointing to a future that would see human beings embrace modernity without becoming its victim, master technology without allowing technological thinking and its instrumentalization of all it embraces to crush our humanity.

But why, given such hopes and concerns, do I want to speak to you here about something seemingly so peripheral and removed from the real business of life as art? I could answer that I chose the general topic “What Does Art Matter?” in response to a suggestion by Professor Wang in his first communication. But that is hardly an adequate answer. To rephrase my question: what does art matter in our modern world? Did the philosopher Hegel not have a point when he proclaimed in Berlin, 180 years ago, very much indebted to the Enlightenment and its faith in reason, that, for us moderns art can no longer have the importance that it once possessed in ancient Greece and that it still had in the Middle Ages? Marx shared that sentiment. And is there not a sense in which the rise of the modern world has to mean the end of art in its highest sense? Has art not become for most of us, if we still care about art at all, first of all a source of entertainment, in some cases a very elevated, edifying entertainment, catering to a small, highly educated cultural elite, but entertainment nonetheless? And if so, should this development be mourned? Should it not rather be welcomed as an inevitable consequence of the progress of both freedom and reason? No doubt, many will continue to enjoy and even to dedicate their lives to art. But have such enjoyment and dedication today not become fundamentally private affairs? Where is the argument showing that there should be public support for the arts? Does art remain a value that deserves to be placed next to such values as respect for human dignity, liberty, the rule of law, human rights?

So let me repeat the question: what does art matter in our modern world? Why do we care about art? I shall return to this question in my second lecture. At the end of these lectures you will, I hope, see just how much is at issue: finally nothing less than our humanity. But I recognize that the attribution of such significance to art is challenged by our modern world, which would seem to support rather the so often heard claim that art in its highest sense has come to an end. It is this claim that I would like to consider in more detail in this first lecture.

2

Let me try to make what is at issue more concrete by turning to a specific event that struck me as a revealing comment on the current state of art when I first read about it in the *New York Times*: on November 21, 1997, Gerard Jan van Bladeren, a little known Dutch artist then in his early 40's who, so he said, likes to slash his own paintings for aesthetic effect, returned to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, where in 1986 he had already slashed Barnett Newman's *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue III?* to attack a second work by Newman, this time "the majestic" *Cathedra* from 1951.⁶ My first response was not shock or surprise, but a diffuse and confused sadness: sadness, not so much because this particular work should have been mangled — there are paintings whose loss would have touched me rather like the death of a dear friend, but not one of Newman's works has befriended me in quite that way. But whether one likes a particular work or not, scarcely matters in cases such as this. Words by the painter Frank Badur came to mind: "The tolerance and freedom that a society grants its art and artists are a measure of its own tolerance, its own freedom."⁷ The space granted to freedom seemed to have become just a bit less. But more seemed at stake. The tolerance and freedom a society grants its artists may reflect only indifference. Van Bladeren's slashing of Newman's art presupposes at least some sense that such art matters, matters enough, at any rate, to provoke the vandal. But does art matter? In what way?

⁶ For a more developed response, see Karsten Harries, "Streepen aan repen," translation by Jan Willem Reimtsma of "Zips and Slashes," *Nexus*, 1998, no. 20, pp. 146 - 163.

⁷ *Hommage a Barnett Newman*, Nationalgalerie Berlin, 1982.

What saddened me was not so much the fact that this particular work of art had been violated, but rather that yet another work of art should have been mangled; also, that yet another self-proclaimed artist should, in the name of art, have chosen to violate the distance that, I continue to feel, should protect art from the world and its violence, a distance museum and concert hall have institutionalized. It seems to me important that, despite all the chaos and suffering in the world and notwithstanding the progressive commercialization and politicization of art, there should be places where individuals are free from what usually occupies them and permit themselves to become totally absorbed in, say, a string quartet by Haydn — or a painting by Newman. But why do I think this important? Why do I think, not only that art continues to matter, but that we today have a special need for art?

I know very well how questionable that distance between art and the world I just invoked has become, how easy it is to defend such acts of vandalism as attacks on an old-fashioned, elitist understanding of art that today has lost whatever legitimacy it once may have had. Has such art not come to an end, precisely in works such as Barnett Newman's *Cathedra*? My own convictions about what art is and should be are called into question, not by occasional acts of violence perpetrated by a few notoriety-craving individuals, but by the disturbing fit of van Bladeren's violent action and the current state of what has become a global art world,⁸ including artists, patrons, critics, academics, galleries, museums, and various institutions that support art — including perhaps even vandals? Today's art world itself has challenged the distance that once was thought to separate art and world, as it plays, and at times not just plays, with the idea that art today gains its significance first of all as a testing of the boundaries of art, even as a violation of what art has long been assumed to be. Has the time not come to challenge such assumptions? What should art be? Should it even be? Art itself has become a riddle to us.

⁸ Cf. Arthur Danto's and George Dickie's institutional theory of art, which holds that "something is a work of art when decreed to be such by a loose constellation of individuals who are defined by their institutional identities to be within something called 'the art world': curators, art writers, collectors, dealers, and, of course, artists themselves who, for whatever reasons, put forward certain objects as candidates for assessment as works of art." Arthur Danto, *Embodied Meaning* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1994), p. 312.

Perhaps a hundred years ago the art world would have dealt with an act such as van Bladeren's slashing of a painting without feeling a need to spill much ink over it, deploring to be sure the damage done to an important work of art and condemning the vandal in no uncertain terms, but able to treat the affair as some unhappy individual's lashing out at society and values that remained unchallenged — and be done with it. How things have changed! That today some presumably thoughtful observers of the art scene would have us discuss van Bladeren's destructive act as itself an aesthetic action deserving serious discussion, as perhaps even an important step in a progress leading art out of its self-imposed isolation from the public at large, calling into question that money-centered elitism that for too long had ruled the art world, was as predictable as that there should have been those — dare we still call them philistines? — who felt that works such as the to them all but meaningless abstractions created by Newman almost deserved their fate. How can one justify spending public funds on art such as this and on institutions such as the Stedelijk Museum?

It is indeed all too easy to construct an apology for van Bladeren: should the five long and two shorter strokes that mutilated the Newman not be considered aesthetically significant expressions of a fearless freedom that refuses to respect the stifling architecture of Newman's *Cathedra*? And did van Bladeren not give Newman's by now already rather dated art a new life, a new actuality. Can van Bladeren not claim to have created a work that goes significantly beyond the comparable, but much more feeble slashings of the Italian artist Lucio Fontana? Such suggestions can no longer be simply dismissed.

What struck me when I saw the mutilated painting in the newspaper was how well it fit into the current art scene: had art not already been "mutilated" by modern art's by now time-honored tradition of challenging all sorts of tabus, especially those with which the custodians of what they consider good art would guard the established and accepted? Duchamp already had suggested the possibility of creating art by using a Rembrandt for an ironing board! Or compare van Bladeren's slashing of the Newman to Duchamp's decision to disfigure Leonardo's Mona Lisa by giving her a mustache. There is, to be sure, this all-important difference: Duchamp did not attempt to use a Rembrandt for an ironing board and his mustache appears only on a cheap reproduction, leaving the

priceless original quite undisturbed in its museum setting. But "priceless original" is of course just the sort of cliché that invites challenge, claiming, as it does, to remove art works from a world where everything has a price and is reproducible. The cliché thus appeals to that boundary supposed to separate the aesthetic realm from the real world with its money and violence. This boundary van Bladeren refused to respect.

Had he respected it, he might have been content to slash some reproduction of *Cathedra*. But such an act would have attracted little attention: in different forms such use and abuse of the work of other artists has by now become an accepted artistic practice. Given an ever more permissive art world, mirror of an ever more permissive society where just about everything seems to go, artists find it ever more difficult to arouse much interest with their appropriations. An art world infatuated with the unexpected and therefore interesting, with what Lyotard celebrates as *novatio*,⁹ demands thus ever more outrageous action, and this demand has to push art towards its own self-deconstruction. Has the interesting, first diagnosed by Friedrich Schlegel and Søren Kierkegaard as a key category to understand a distinctive modern aesthetic sensibility, later so brilliantly enacted by Duchamp, not come to replace the beautiful and the sublime as the aesthetic category that does the greatest justice to today's art production?

From this perspective we may want to consider van Bladeren an artist led by his pursuit of the ever more interesting from just playing with the idea of destroying what other artists had established to actual destruction. Can van Bladeren's action not be understood as an all too predictable culmination of that pursuit of the interesting? If so, one could also argue that van Bladeren did well to slash paintings by Newman, for no modern painter more vigorously rejected the aesthetic of the interesting, which was to become so important to post-modernism, than Newman, who declared that while an artist such as Robert Motherwell might wish to make Duchamp a father, "Duchamp is his father and not mine nor that of any American painter that I respect."¹⁰ Newman stood for a very different understanding of what mattered in art.

⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, "Answer to the Question: What is the Postmodern," in *The Postmodern Explained*, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 10.

¹⁰ Barnett Newman, *Selected Writings and Interviews* p. 208.

A significant aesthetic battle line was drawn here. And must we not say today that Barnett Newman's place is indeed in a museum, that he already belongs to a past removed from our post-modern world: Most contemporary artists find Duchamp more relevant. He has become much more of a father figure to them than Newman, as Newman would no doubt have admitted. To be sure, he would have lost little time to turn such an admission into an attack on artists corrupted by what he thought the false aesthetics that would blur the boundary between art and non-art. "In Europe the great aestheticians among the painters were the dada [artists], who said, 'We're against art because we really know what art is,' ... [insisting] that a piece of paper dropped, that a sound yelled, that anything was a work of art... The best example of this is Marcel Duchamp, who identified art or tried to destroy art by pointing to the fountain, and we now have museums that show screwdrivers and automobiles and paintings. [The museums] have accepted the position that there's no way of knowing what is what. Well, if there is no way, I feel it's time for the Museum of Modern Art, for example, to put on an exhibition of machine guns. After all, they're beautiful [in] function, they have wonderful forms, they're full of content, and they actually make noise."¹¹

There is indeed a sense in which, as Newman suspected, Duchamp can be said to have brought a certain kind of art to an end. Does art today not gain its significance first of all as a testing of the boundaries or as an expanding of the space of art, both inevitably also a violation of what art has long been assumed to be? Duchamp himself declared something of the sort to have been his intention. "When I discovered the ready-mades I thought to discourage aesthetics. In Neo Dada they have taken my ready-mades and found aesthetic beauty in them. I threw the bottle-rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty."¹²

Duchamp's claim here that he wanted to discourage aesthetics should be compared with Newman's charge that in the name of aesthetics the Dada artists destroyed art. Two very different interpretations of "aesthetics" here collide.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 245.

¹² Quoted in Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (New York, 1965), pp. 207- 208.

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Duchamp, in keeping with a by then well-established tradition, linked the aesthetics he opposed to a concern for beauty. On the aesthetic approach, so understood, the first concern of the artist should be to create a beautiful object. Art exists for beauty's sake. And how is "beauty" here to be understood? We are given a first answer by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who founded philosophical aesthetics in the early 18th century and gave the new discipline its name: what Duchamp called "aesthetic beauty" Baumgarten defined as "sensible perfection." The beautiful, this claims, addresses our senses, not just our understanding; "perfection" suggests that what we experience is so organized that nothing seems to be missing and nothing superfluous: beauty implies integrity, wholeness.

A concern for beauty so understood has indeed presided over the progress of much western art, especially so since the 18th century. And although soon called into question, already in the 18th century by critics and artists who opposed the beautiful to the sublime, somewhat later by those who, like Duchamp, pursued the interesting, that progress can be said to have both culminated and to reached some sort of end some time in the 1960's. Both culmination and end find expression in the words the abstract expressionist painter Frank Stella used to describe his artistic goals.

I always get into arguments with people who want to retain the old values in painting, the humanistic values that they always find on the canvas. If you pin them down, they always end up asserting that there is something there besides the paint on the canvas. My painting is based on the fact that only what can be seen is there. It really is an object. Any painting is an object and anyone who gets involved enough in this finally has to face up to the objectness of whatever he's doing. He is making a thing. All that should be taken for granted. If the painting were lean enough, accurate enough, or right enough, you would just be able to look at it. All I want anyone to get out of my paintings, and all that I ever get out of them, is the

fact that you can see the whole idea without confusion.... What you see is what you see.¹³

I would like to underscore four points:

1. Stella would have his painting absorb our attention in such a way that we feel no need to look beyond it for meaning. It thus should **not** present itself to us as a representation that has its measure in the absent represented; nor as a sign that receives its meaning from the absent signified; nor as a symbol gesturing towards absent significance; nor as an allegory figuring absent meaning. Its presence should not be haunted by absence. What Archibald MacLeish said of the poem holds of it, too: it should not mean, but be.

2. The painting should be such that it allows us to "see the whole idea without confusion." It should not leave us wondering whether we may be missing something. Nothing in it should strike us as superfluous; nor should we experience it as just a fragment of some absent whole. The painting should present itself as a self-sufficient whole.

3. Such completeness demands of the observer that he leave the painting alone, that he keep his distance from it. Such distanced beholding is different from the way we usually relate to things; think of care that seeks to help; of desire that wants to possess; of aversion that would avoid; of hate that calls for destruction. First of all we are interested in what we encounter and interest does not leave things or persons alone. Aesthetic beholding lets the beheld be what it is. This is why Kant understood the beautiful as object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction.

4. To the painting's self-justifying presence corresponds the self-sufficiency of our experience of it. Paintings are not useful in any obvious sense; they are not good for anything. But just their uselessness endows them with an appeal denied to anything that answers to our everyday interests. This uselessness allows us to exist in the present, for all interest is always directed towards the future. Thus it lets us be at one with ourselves

¹³ "Questions to Stella and Judd," Interview with Bruce Glaser, edited by Lucy R. Lippard, *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 157 - 158.

in a way denied by our usual engagement in the world. To the plenitude of the aesthetic object corresponds the plenitude of aesthetic experience so understood.

Stella's remarks are hardly isolated. What he terms "the old values in painting, the humanistic values" are called into question as soon as the goal of art is understood to be the pursuit of beauty. Stella's remarks thus articulate the telos of all art governed by the aesthetic approach to which Baumgarten, Kant, and Schopenhauer gave such convincing expression. That telos demands an ever more resolute turn away from signification, from meaning, from words, especially of course from the Word, i. e. from the subservience of art to Holy Scripture, to religion. The aesthetic approach insists on the autonomy of art: art should be pursued only for art's sake. It is aesthetics so understood that Duchamp calls into question.

I have suggested that the aesthetic approach demands the effacement of meaning. But is this not an impossible demand? To experience something as a work of art is to experience it as something someone chose to create. This makes a work of art different from, say, a beautiful pebble we happen to find on some beach. Works of art, when experienced as art, are never simply there; they always gesture beyond themselves to some intended meaning. That remains true even of the most minimal work of art. To demand of art that it should just be, not mean, is to demand the impossible. The ideal of a totally self-sufficient artistic presence must remain elusive, must remain a mere idea, can not become an experienced reality: the desired presence remains absent. The work of art is at most the figure of this absent presence.

But this is to say that, if modern art has its telos in a presence that would efface meaning, it has its telos in the negation of its own art character. So understood modern art, by its very essence, tends towards its own destruction as art. We meet with a hint of this already in Kant, when he writes "art can be called fine (*schön*) only if we are conscious that it is art while yet it looks to us like nature."¹⁴ That is to say, art should have the look of non-art. According to the critic Clement Greenberg it is indeed precisely this "look of non-art" that confers presence on a painting. Stella's art, as the painter himself insisted, was supposed to be entirely visual. But while we can grant that such

¹⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, par. 45, A177/B179; trans. Werner S. Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 83.

objects are no longer supposed to mean anything, this art, intended to look like non-art, looks like and is appreciated as art after all, despite this intention. Because Stella recognized this, he did not claim that his painting succeeded in being entirely visual; what he said was something different: "I also want my painting to be so you can't avoid the fact that it's supposed to be entirely visual." This not only admits that even this minimal art communicates a meaning, an intention; it even declares that the very point of his painting is to declare such an intention. It is meant to communicate the dream of an artistic presence strong enough to silence meaning. But the work of art is not itself this presence, but only its metaphor. The dream of presence remains just that — a dream.

I have argued that even the most minimal art is never simply present, but gestures towards an ideal meaning. The passionate interest so many have brought to minimal art can thus not be divorced from an interest in its meaning. But why such interest? What does presence matter? Is what is merely present not essentially meaningless? An answer to such questions is provided by the Russian suprematist painter Kasimir Malevich, whose decision, in 1914, to place a black square on a white background and to present the result as a painting constitutes one of the decisive acts in the history of modern painting: here its hidden telos became image. In explanation of this decision Malevich writes that he chose the square as the most abstract form and black and white as the most abstract colors. "Abstract" here means not only non-representational; it means free of all associations, feelings, emotions, interests that tie us to the world. The square is chosen because it has no physiognomy, because it is in this sense uninteresting and precisely because of this more purely present. Interest stands in the way of presence.

But to repeat the earlier question: why this fascination with presence? Why this attempt to get away from meaning? In his answer Malevich appeals to the conflict between our demands for meaning and the silence of the world. Again and again this conflict has led human beings to veil this silence with the words of poets, philosophers, and especially of prophets. Today, Malevich suggests, these words have shown themselves for what they are, human creations and, once recognized as such, unable to sustain us. The disintegration of the old value system has left us an oppressive silence. But that silence only remains oppressive as long as we continue to demand meaning of

the world. It is from this demand that Malevich wants to liberate us. We should learn to accept reality as it is.

To the traditional ideal of life as a vocation Malevich opposes thus his own ideal of what he calls a white mankind. "The consciousness of this mankind" is said to be "non-objective." We exist in this sense non-objectively when we no longer need objects, and precisely because of this have become free to let things be the things they are. This freedom to let things be is distinguished by him from the freedom to do what one wants to do. The latter Malevich finds questionable because it leaves us with the question: what are we to do? and just this question has no convincing answer.

Malevich dreams of an existence that is no longer burdened by the vain demand for a higher meaning. He knows that to pursue this dream, we must learn to let things be, to become more accepting of persons and things. The white world of suprematism is to transport us into such a state of mind, lead us to accept the world as it presents itself to us. The pursuit of presence is to lead us beyond nihilism.

The simple white square is a limit of modern art that Malevich thinks, but does not try to mark with a particular work. His black on white compositions already represent a further step: the silence has been broken. Geometrical shapes announce their presence. And precisely because the black square and the black circle have so little meaning in the usual sense, they announce their presence more forcefully than do the more familiar things of the world, which, because we know where to place them are easily overlooked and taken for granted. Because these things have a meaning, in this sense speak to us, their simple presence is obscured. Silence and presence belong together.

But once again we have to remind ourselves that all art has a meaning and speaks to us of an intention. This art, too, strikes us as not just being, but as meant just to be. With good reason the art historian Werner Haftmann called Malevich's Black Square a "symbolic act," a "demonstration." Both terms suggest that the artist was not so much trying to paint a picture as to make a point. Malevich's *Black on White* — and the same is true of Barnett Newman's or Frank Stella's paintings of the sixties — is a theatrical gesture that refers us beyond itself, that invites us to explore the artist's intention and the

intention speaks to us more strongly and pathetically in the case of one of Malevich's suprematist compositions than in much more traditional, representational art.

But what is the meaning intended by Malevich? Malevich's self-interpretation provides an answer: his art is to silence all meaning, all words; it gestures towards whiteness, towards the void. His Black Square has nothing for its meaning. This nothing is the modern sacred. The following remark by Malevich makes this quite clear:

But there is no icon on which the holy is a zero. The essence of God is zero salvation. In this essence lies at the same time salvation zero... If the heroes and saints were to become aware that the salvation of the future is zero salvation, they would be confused by reality. The hero would let his sword drop and the prayers of the saint would die on his lips.¹⁵

Malevich's suprematist compositions are icons that seek to establish zero as the holy. In a way that recalls Schopenhauer, they offer an illustration of what Nietzsche wrote in *The Genealogy of Morals*: “man would rather will *nothingness* than *not* will.”¹⁶

In very broad strokes I have attempted to suggest that the understanding of beauty as sensible perfection that has presided over the aesthetic approach in the West ever since the 18th century had to lead to a pursuit of presence that in turn has to end in silence. Malevich's suprematist compositions and in a very different the minimal art of the sixties occupy the threshold towards such silence. A certain kind of art here does seem to have come to an end. But art of course continued. In order to continue it required different heroes, different master narratives. It is therefore not surprising that Duchamp rather than Malevich, Andy Warhol rather than Barnett Newman should have presided over so much recent art production.

4

When Duchamp sought to discourage aesthetics and the pursuit of aesthetic beauty, he did not mean to bring art to an end, but just an art that in its ever more rigorous

¹⁵ Kasimir Malevich, *Suprematismus — die gegenstandslose Welt*, trans. and ed. H. von Riesen (Cologne: Dumont, 1962), p. 57.

¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, 28, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, *On the Genealogy of Morals/ Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 163.

pursuit of beauty had to turn its back on meaning. Precisely by inviting artists to turn away from presence back to meaning, away from the aesthetic category of beauty to the aesthetic category of the interesting Duchamp gave art a new life. This formulation implies that, despite his explicit claim, Duchamp did not in fact reject aesthetics as such. There is a sense in which Barnett Newman was right to consider Duchamp perhaps the greatest aesthete among modern painters. He was recognized as such by the philosopher Arthur Danto, who speaks of Duchamp's "philosophical achievement," crediting him with having led us towards a more adequate understanding of the essence of art.

For it must have seemed as though "work of art" was an expression much like "elephant" that we learn to apply on the basis of perceptual criteria. Duchamp's great philosophical achievement was to demonstrate that it is not this kind of expression at all, and that learning to apply it to things involves a far more complex procedure than anyone would have believed necessary. But this could not have been shown until history made it possible: Duchamp would have been impossible when the kind of conceptual imagination required by his gesture was itself historically impossible. When it did become possible, it became plain that the Beautiful and the Sublime did not belong to the essence of art.¹⁷

Duchamp can thus be said to have freed artists from a particular narrative that, by making beauty or sublimity the end of art, threatens to put an end to art.

But the claim that with a work like *Fountain* Duchamp brought us closer to an adequate understanding of "the essence of art" presupposes what cannot be presupposed: that there is indeed such an essence. But in what Platonic heaven do we find that essence? What Duchamp did show was that in the early 20th century the art world became willing to apply the term "art" to creations that were neither beautiful nor sublime, but interesting. His *Fountain* does call the meaning of art into question; more especially it calls into question a particular understanding of the work of art as a beautiful aesthetic object. This allows the philosopher Arthur Danto to call on it as a witness to support his own critique of aesthetics.

¹⁷ Danto, *Encounters and Reflections*, p. 6.

My book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* took a fairly hostile position on aesthetics, but the target of the hostility was that detached and disinterested aesthetics which is so salient in the philosophical tradition, and beyond that, the tacit view, implicit in our practice, of linking art and aesthetics so closely together that they are somehow inseparable. My view was different. I felt that aesthetics does not really belong to the essence of art, and my argument was as follows. Two objects, one a work of art and the other not, but which happen to resemble one another as closely as may be required for purposes of the argument, will have very different aesthetic properties. But since the difference depended on the ontological difference between art and non-art, it could not account for the former difference. The aesthetic difference presupposed the ontological difference. Hence aesthetic qualities could not be part of the definition of art.¹⁸

The claim that aesthetics does not belong to the essence of art is readily granted: art may be influenced by aesthetics, some art even crucially so, but Barnett Newman had a point when he suggested that aesthetics is no more for artists, than ornithology is for birds.¹⁹ Aesthetics is theory that artists may or may not find important. But what mattered to Danto was something else: the hold a certain understanding of art, presupposed by much traditional aesthetic thinking, continues to have on us, even given countless works that the current art world has certified to be art, but that do not fit what such an aesthetics had declared works of art to be. In this connection Danto points to the enormous importance of Warhol's Brillo Box (1964), a worthy successor to Duchamp's "philosophical achievement."

Now, *Brillo Box* served a purpose in making vivid the deep question in ontology of how something could be a work of art while other things which resembled it to the point where at least their photographs were indiscernible, were not. The mere Brillo boxes which are not works art

¹⁸ Danto, *Embodied Meanings*, p. 384.

¹⁹ Barnett Newman, "Remarks at the Fourth Annual Woodstock Conference," *Selected Writings and Interviews* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 247.

nevertheless were not mere things, like fleas: they were among the kinds of things Joseph Margolis has called cultural “emergents,” which, like artworks, embody meanings. The interesting thing is to show how the meanings of these two cultural emergents differ, and hence how their aesthetics differ. Or better to show the difference in the art criticism of the two objects.²⁰

Danto's discussion of the difference is telling: the original Brillo box had been designed by an artist, Steve Harvey, a second-generation Abstract Expressionist forced to take up commercial art. Danto points to the connection between the Brillo box and “the high art styles of that time.”²¹ But Warhol's Brillo Box has nothing to do with Abstract Expressionism, is in fact much closer to works by such artists as Oldenburg or Lichtenstein than it is to the actual Brillo box. And by now the artist Mike Bidlo has created his Brillo boxes, different from, even if self-consciously repeating Warhol's, making the question of the significance of such appropriation more explicit.

I agree with Danto on the difference between the different Brillo boxes, although I would want to draw from this a different lesson. Danto has good reason to claim that the question: why is Warhol's Brillo Box art while that in the supermarket is not? can no longer be answered by art; it requires philosophy. Philosophy will indeed support the claim that the different Brillo boxes have very different meanings. But the philosopher will also want to point out that the claim that Warhol's Brillo box is art is in tension with another, quite traditional claim that Danto, agreeing here with Hegel, makes: that successful art effectively embodies a spiritual content. Eminently reproducible, as Mike Bidlo demonstrated, Warhol's Brillo Box no longer possesses anything like the aura of, say a self-portrait by Rembrandt or van Gogh.

I find it impossible to cite Brillo Box as an example of “successful art” so understood — where some no doubt will object, responding to my use of the word “aura” here, that such an understanding of success is not in keeping with the spirit of this age of the technical reproducibility of just about everything. I shall return to this objection and to Walter Benjamin who had so much to say about the loss of aura in my concluding

²⁰ Danto, *Embodied Meanings*, p. 384.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 385.

lecture. Like Duchamp's ready-mades, in this case, too, the material object is, as Bidlo demonstrates, eminently replacable. The original here matters little; the artwork has lost its aura. Does Warhol's Brillo Box not rather suggest that success in art does not depend on the incarnation of meaning in some particular matter, but rather on some object's mode of presentation, the artist's intention, the historical and spatial context into which he chose to insert his work? This to be sure only re-raises the question: how are we to understand success in art? Appeals to some supposed "essence of art" do no real work here, for they presuppose that this question has already been answered.

One last time let me return to Danto's understanding of the lessons of Brillo Box.

Steve Harvey's boxes are about Brillo and about the values of speed, cleanliness, and the relentless advantages of the new and the gigantic. Warhol's iconography is more complex and has little to do with those values at all. In a way it is philosophical, being about art or, if you like, about the differences between high art and commercial art. So Hegel may be right that there is a special aesthetic quality peculiar to art. He impressively says it is, unlike natural aesthetic qualities (he uses the term "beauty," but that was the way aestheticians in his era thought), the kind of aesthetic quality which is *aus dem Geiste geboren und wiedergeboren* [born of the spirit and reborn]. But that is no less true of the aesthetic qualities of Brillo boxes than of those of Brillo Box. We would expect nothing else, given that both are dense with meaning and, in a sense, *aus der Kultur geboren* [born of culture]. It may be less important to distinguish high art from low than either from mere natural aesthetics of the kind we derive from our genetic endowment.²²

A first question is raised by Danto's parenthetical remark: Hegel "uses the term 'beauty,' but that was the way aestheticians in his era thought." But more is at stake: when Hegel understands *Kunstschönheit* as "*die aus dem Geiste geborene und wiedergeborene Schönheit*,"²³ he not only distinguishes the beauty of art from that of nature but also

²² Danto, *Embodied Meanings*, p. 386.

²³ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, in *Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Frommann, 1937), vol. 12, p. 20.

relates the two. *Wiedergeboren* suggest that art responds to a pre-given beauty, to the beauty the artist finds in nature, but lets be born again, creating thus a higher beauty. Art is understood here as the beautiful re-representation of beautiful nature, raising the question of whether art does not need that ground in nature, whether it must not wither and die when uprooted. And that question invites another: whether we human beings must not wither and die when uprooted from nature. I shall return to these questions in my last lecture.

5

A different question is raised by Hegel's understanding of beauty. Danto claims to find himself in fundamental agreement with Hegel's determination of beautiful art: "Hegel, with characteristic profundity, spoke of beautiful art as the Idea given sensuous embodiment. As a start this gives us the rudiments of a philosophical concept of art, and a first stab at a theory of criticism: the critic must identify the idea embodied in the work and assess the adequacy of its embodiment."²⁴ Hegel's definition invites us to inquire both into the Idea in question and into the effectiveness of its embodiment. Danto does not seem to be overly concerned with the former, understood by Hegel as the unity of subjectivity and objectivity — the shift from "Idea" to "idea" covers up what separates him from Hegel — nor does he seem overly concerned with Hegel's insistence on effective embodiment.

As we have seen, Duchamp and Warhol, the two artists who provided Danto with something like a key to understanding art and the end of art, would both seem to fail to meet what Hegel's formulation demands. Only Danto's leveling appropriation of Hegel's understanding of art, which sheds Hegel's metaphysical commitments, allows him to greet the end of art, as Danto understands it, as really a liberation from a master narrative that had made the pursuit of beauty and presence the end of art. Danto is right to note that by the sixties this narrative had lost its hold on artists and critics alike. And Danto goes even further, suggesting that the end of art of which he is speaking may signal a liberation, not just from this, but from all the master narratives that have tried to bind the artist's freedom. So understood the end of art promises art more freedom and a more

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

vigorous life. And should we not perhaps read what is said here about art as having also an ethical and a political significance?

Hegel, however, had in mind a very different master narrative when he proclaimed the death of art in its highest sense: history understood as the progress of reason and freedom. Hegel placed art at the beginning of this progress. But that beginning, he argued, lies behind us moderns. The progress of spirit, Hegel thought, has to relegate art in its highest sense to a never to be recovered past. So understood, the death of art in its highest sense took place in the West not in the 20th, but no later than the 18th century.

Our common sense would seem to support Hegel. Many, perhaps most of us, tend to connect great art with the past. Faced with the art of our own time we soon become unsure: do Duchamp and Warhol really offer us a key to the essence of art, as Danto would have us believe? Do they not support rather the suspicion that this is no longer art in what once was its highest sense? Or should we look for that key to artists like Stella or Newman? Most people today — although, as Danto demonstrates with his writings, by no means all — would seem to have an autumnal view of art. To challenge such a claim that art in its highest sense belongs to a never to be recovered past, one might point to our flourishing art business: do the enormous sums that people are willing to spend on art not demonstrate that many still care about art and are willing to back up their conviction with their dollars. One could also cite the crowds attracted to our leading museums, especially when there is some block-buster exhibition. Does all this not demonstrate that art remains very much alive?

But just the institution of the art museum raises questions. How many of us feel today that the proper place for a really great work of art is indeed a museum? What greater seal of approval for an artist than to have his or her work bought by a major museum? Given such an endorsement, backed by money, who could doubt that a work like Newman's *Cathedra* is indeed a work of art of the highest rank? For two centuries now the association of art and museum has come to replace such older associations as art and church or temple, art and palace. As we know it, the art museum is a comparatively recent institution, emerging only in the last decades of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century, lagging somewhat behind such related phenomena as e. g. archeology, art-

history, and neo-gothic architecture. In this connection it is interesting to note that Karl Schinkel's *Altes Museum* in Berlin, the first museum in which the historical point of view ruled the arrangement of pictures, was being built just as Hegel lectured in the same city on the end of art: the museum and Hegel's lectures are both expressions of a wide-spread past-oriented attitude, not just to art, but also to religion, and even to nature.

Ever since the Enlightenment art has been invested with the aura of the sacred, the museum with the aura of the temple. Schinkel's *Altes Museum* was thus only one of countless museums built in the image of a Greek temple, structures haunted by the absence of those gods temples once served. Such iconography invites reflection about the kind of understanding and appreciation of art that built such museums: could it be that a presupposition of the Enlightenment's cult of the art of the past is the experienced absence of gods and God? Nostalgia for what has been lost that find expression in the loving conservation of the remaining traces? Schinkel's *Altes Museum* is shadowed by a suspicion that the death of God entailed also the death of art in its highest sense. To the extent that the Enlightenment's understanding of art remains our own, we, too, will associate great art with the past.

To be sure, the very distance that separates art from our modern everyday world has become a matter of concern, especially for many artists. The custodians of many of our major museums have thus been forced to blur the line between museum and shopping mall, art and entertainment in order to attract ever greater crowds and keep the money coming. Art has become big business. But this embrace of art by business and entertainment hardly provides an effective answer to those who wonder whether Hegel may not have been right when he denied a future to art in its highest sense. To be sure, for most of us ART continues to be bathed in a special aura. As Duchamp found himself forced to admit, that aura has proved strong enough to envelop even his *Fountain*, intended to do away with just that aura. Stepping into a museum many of us still enter an aesthetic church, a sublime and rather chilly necropolis, stretching back across time, where Leonardo and Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Cézanne, and now Picasso and Duchamp. Pollock and Warhol join frozen hands. Part of this attitude is an often almost religious reverence and respect, but also a suspicion that what really matters in our lives lies elsewhere. Not that most of us would question the importance of preserving this

heritage, even as we might find it difficult to explain just what it is that makes such preservation so important and few of us today will still be able to muster the kind of fervor that built the *Altes Museum*. What needs preserving does so precisely because even though still treasured, it has lost its place in our world and must therefore be given a special place — often at great expense.

When Hegel in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* claimed that “the beautiful days of Greek art, and the golden time of the later middle ages are gone by” and proclaimed that “art is, and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past,”²⁵ he expressed convictions already quite familiar to his listeners, who read their Winckelmann and were likely to blame what they considered the sad state of modern culture for the decline of art.

They were not entirely wrong, as I will try to show in the next lecture. But Hegel himself was not content with such a response. To it he opposed his own more philosophical account that would have us affirm the end of art in its highest sense as a corollary of humanity’s coming of age. If Hegel is right, enlightenment and the death of art in its highest sense go together. And are we not heirs of the Enlightenment? As an interpretation of the place of art in the modern world Hegel’s account still demands our attention.

But has Hegel’s thesis on the future of art not been refuted by the explosive development of art since he made his dire pronouncements, a development that has given us much of the art that today we value most highly? Monet and Van Gogh. Picasso and Pollock all created their masterpieces long after Hegel proclaimed the end of art in its highest sense. Should that not suffice to refute Hegel’s proclamation? But before we can even begin to decide whether or not this is indeed the case, we have to become clearer about just what it is that Hegel asserts. Hegel never meant to deny that there still is and in the future will be art. But such art has lost what once was art’s highest function: that function, he claimed, is satisfied only “when it has taken its place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy, and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness

²⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, in *Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Fromann, 1937), vol. 12, pp. 31 and 32; Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, ed. and intro. Michael Inwood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), pp. 12 and 13.

and bringing to utterance the Divine Nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind. It is in works of art that nations have deposited the profoundest intuitions and ideas of their hearts; and fine art is frequently the key — with many nations there is no other — to the understanding of their wisdom and religion.”²⁶ So understood, art in its highest sense is a privileged vehicle for expressing what mostly profoundly matters. But we have subordinated the authority of the heart to that of reason. Our reflective culture thus can no longer grant art that role and importance it possessed in ancient Greece, that it still had in the Middle Ages and, we can add, retained in much of Europe as late as the 18th century, that it still retains in parts of the world that have not yet been transformed by our now global modern culture. But must we, who belong to this modern world, not agree with Hegel when he claims that for us art has lost “its genuine truth and life.”²⁷ And this “we” also includes today’s artists. Does their art-making not take place in and bear witness to a world in which art can only have a peripheral significance?

To claim this is not to deny that many will continue to enjoy and even to dedicate their lives to art. Hegel’s claim that art in its highest sense has ended does not call into question either art born of the pursuit of beauty or art born of the pursuit of the interesting. Quite the opposite: Hegel can help us to a better understanding of why, in their different ways, despite the battle line that separated the two, artists like Newman and Duchamp are very much in keeping with the shape of the modern world. What Hegel insists on is only that those who truly belong to this modern world will look to reason, not to art to guide them to what makes life worth living. That function art has lost. And that function is needed only as long as human beings remain incapable of knowing reality in more adequate ways. We live in an age that has made thought the privileged custodian of truth and for that very reason we are bound to associate art in its highest sense with the past. Most of us no longer consider art a privileged vehicle for the pursuit of truth. Such art lies behind us, belongs to our past. To mourn its death would be as foolish as to mourn the loss of that magic or aura so many things held when we were still children.

²⁶ Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

But if Hegel interprets the end of art in its traditional highest sense as part of humanity's coming of age, something in us resists this interpretation, perhaps an awareness that more is at stake here than just the fate of art. As I shall attempt to show: such resistance is justified. But as Hegel can teach us, such resistance means inevitably also resistance to the shape of our modern world. Such resistance, too, is justified. As I shall also try to show, our task is to comprehend both the legitimacy and the limits of the understanding of reality that rules our science, our technology, and thus our modern world.

2. Art in the Age of the Decorated Shed

1

I began my first lecture with the question why, given the many pressing problems we all face, did I choose to speak to you about something seemingly so unimportant and removed from the pressing issues of the day as art? What does art matter in our modern world? I want to begin this second lecture by raising once more what remains essentially the same question. But, as the title of this lecture suggests, I now want to give that question a special turn and ask: What does art matter in this age of the decorated shed?

That reformulation calls for explanation: what do I have in mind when I call our modern epoch “the age of the decorated shed”? The characterization is meant to be first of all descriptive: the architecture most in keeping with the spirit of our age is, as I will show, an architecture of decorated sheds. Despite the modernist rhetoric that form should follow function, at least part of us resists the look of pure functionality in the built environment and demands more. And can something analogous not also be said of our art? Do we not need art and culture to decorate a life that seems impoverished without such embellishment?

But if my characterization is meant to be descriptive, it is also meant to be critical: the turn to decoration that is so characteristic of the age has, as I will also try to show, lost sight of the most important task art faces today, even as both the practice and the theory of art for the most part fail to recognize this. I shall therefore conclude this lecture with some remarks that will point towards what I take to be what I called “the most important task art faces today.” These pointers will be expanded in my fourth and final lecture.

2

My characterization of our modern epoch as “the age of the decorated shed” raises a prior question: what do I mean by this expression “decorated shed,” which I

borrowed from the authors of *Learning from Las Vegas*?²⁸ A shed is a structure raised to meet a certain need; like a tool, it has a function. But from the very beginning human beings have demanded more of their dwellings and tools — and indeed of their own bodies: the urge to decorate is as old as humanity. Human beings have thus always demanded more of their buildings than that they provide shelter, storage space, or a functional frame for certain activities: they have demanded that they please in their appearance, in the way they present themselves to the senses, i. e. that they also give pleasure as aesthetic objects. That there is tension in this twofold demand was noted already by Kant, who recognized the difficulty architecture has rising to the purity found in such arts as sculpture or painting, for, as he observes, "what is essential in a work of architecture is the product's adequacy for a certain use,"²⁹ while only a concern for beauty, he thought, elevates a mere building into a work of architecture. Essentially the same thing can be said of countless other things, e. g. of ceramics or of gardens.

In quite the same spirit Nikolaus Pevsner thus begins his *An Outline of European Architecture* with this seemingly self-evident and often invoked observation: "A bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture."³⁰ The work of architecture is said by Pevsner to be "designed with a view to aesthetic appeal": work of architecture = building + aesthetic component. Such an understanding of the work of architecture is indeed called for by that aesthetic approach, which, as I discussed in my first lecture, demands of the artwork that it be so organized that nothing is felt to be missing or superfluous, i. e. demands of it what 18th century theorists liked to call "sensible perfection." The perfection that the aesthetic approach demands of the artwork means that nothing is to be added to it, nothing to be taken away. By its very perfection, such an aesthetic object can stand in no essential relationship to its context. Aesthetic objects, so understood, are spiritually mobile, even if they happen to be firmly fixed to a place. Their perfection also entails that the aesthetic observer should keep his distance

²⁸ Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, *Learning From Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1977)

²⁹ Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, par. 51. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 192.

³⁰ Nikolaus Pevsner, *An Outline of European Architecture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958), p. 23.

from such a work, leave what he observes just as it is, that he should just stand before it, contemplate its aesthetic plenitude, absorbed in its presence.

That there tension in an understanding of works of architecture as functional buildings that should be appreciated also as aesthetic objects in this sense should be obvious: their very perfection renders aesthetic objects uninhabitable. It is thus hardly surprising that with the rise of the aesthetic approach in the eighteenth century, architecture, caught increasingly between the conflicting claims of the engineer and the artist, should have entered a period of uncertainty and crisis from which it has not yet emerged. That uncertainty finds one expression in the question: where do schools of architecture belong: with technical universities or with art academies? The aesthetic approach has to lead to an understanding of the work of architecture as a compromise between essentially unrelated concerns, a compromise that has to violate the demands of both beauty and utility, where, as Kant observes, the latter normally will take first place. The 19th century thus tended to entrust the training of architects first of all to technical universities. Today's architecture world has tended to separate the engineer from the architect-artist more completely, allowing the latter to claim his place besides the sculptor and the painter. With this the architect's task tends to reduce to the creation of aesthetic objects that also meet whatever programmatic requirements are pre-given, where the more pragmatic architects, concerned to stay within the limits of the available budget, are likely to think first of all of contour and applied decoration, content to clothe the body of the building in an aesthetically pleasing exterior (see e. g. Cesar Pelli), while the artistically more ambitious would transform the building as a whole into a kind of mega-sculpture, allowing the sculptural dress to bend and shape, perhaps smother the architecture beneath (see e. g. Frank Gehry). In either case, the actual construction is entrusted to the engineer. In both cases the aesthetic component presents itself as a welcome, yet from the point of view of function, dispensable addendum, where the question, just why should such an addendum be welcomed, sometimes at enormous extra cost, demands an answer.

As the examples I mentioned show, I am using "decorated shed" here in a rather broad sense that not only includes buildings to which decoration of one sort or another was added only after they were essentially complete — the decorated sheds of the

nineteenth century provide obvious examples — but all buildings that add an aesthetic component to structures that, as far as their function is concerned, have no need for that component. Decoration, as I am using the term here, here is understood to stand in an essentially external relationship to the structure that bears it.³¹ Indeed, given the aesthetic approach, as I sketched it in my first lecture, the beauty of a work of architecture has to appear as something added on to what necessity dictates, as decoration in this broad sense. In this expanded sense, someone who wants to give a high rise the look of a turning torso, as Santiago Calatrava did in Malmö, Sweden, or an apartment building the look of a dancing couple, or perhaps as a ruin, as Frank Gehry did in Prague,³² also

³¹ In *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1997) I thus distinguish, somewhat artificially, given the way these terms are often used interchangeably, “decoration” from “ornament,” the former understood as an aesthetic addendum standing in no essential relationship to the decorated building, the latter understood as standing in such a relationship. See especially pp. 50-68.

³² I realize that the building also invites more thoughtful responses. I am thinking especially of the response it received from Josef Pesch, who understands this modestly scaled office building, which rose where a stray American bomb had torn a hole into the otherwise remarkably intact fabric of this historical city, as not just another, particularly interesting, expression of playful post-modernism, but as an appropriate reminder of the darkest period of European, indeed of world history. Pesch thus invites us to see the empty dome, crowning the right half of the building, as referring to the similarly empty dome of the Hieroshima A-bomb monument, to experience the not only playful, but disturbingly deconstructive, ruinous look of the building an appropriate response to a past that left much more than buildings in ruins. How is poetry possible after Auschwitz? Theodor Adorno asked. Faced with this building, Josef Pesch invites us to ask: how is architecture possible after Auschwitz? I admit that this building offers an occasion for such pathos-laden thoughts; also as an occasion for very different thoughts. I wonder thus about the appropriateness of building a modest office building as a pathos-laden monument, a monument that I experience not so much as a monument to a past shadowed by Auschwitz and Hirsoshima, as to this particular architect’s creativity, which found in site and program a welcome occasion to exercise his playfulness. The playfulness of the building in this site brought to my mind Adorno’s subsequent revision of his remark about the supposed impossibility of poetry after Auschwitz. Adorno knew of course that, as it stands, the remark cannot be defended: “The proposition, after Auschwitz it is no longer possible to write a poem, is not valid without qualifications: but this is certain: that after Auschwitz, because it was possible and remains possible for further than we can see, no art that is serene or cheerful (heiter) can be imagined. Objectively it will degenerate into cynicism, no matter how it borrows the goodness of human understanding.” (Theodor W. Adorno, “Ist die Kunst heiter?” *Noten zur Literatur* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch, 1981], pp. 603-604) Cf. Josef Pesch “Frank Gehry’s ‘Ginger and Fred’ in Prague: Playfully Postmodern or Seriously Post-

decorates some shed, even though here the aesthetic component is not simply added on to an essentially complete building, but is allowed to shape and distort the entire structure.³³ What matters is that in both cases the aesthetic component and the building, understood here as a kind of machine that should meet certain programmatic requirements, stand in no essential relationship. This has to give the work that gets actually built a look of arbitrariness: why should an apartment building look like a twisted torso, a dancing couple, or a ruin? In my first lecture I introduced the aesthetic category of the interesting. And no doubt: these buildings are interesting: they have proven this by generating a great deal of interest, as the public response demonstrates. But should we not demand more of architecture than that it be interesting?³⁴

Despite the seemingly so obvious correctness of what Pevsner claims, is Lincoln Cathedral adequately understood as a decorated shed? What distinguishes it from more ordinary buildings is not just the addition of an aesthetic component, but that component here has a re-presentational³⁵ function: it lets us experience what we see precisely as a cathedral, i. e. as more than just a building large enough to allow a multitude to assemble and that for whatever reason was deemed important enough to expend the resources

Apocalyptic?" *Kunst und Kultur* 4.5 (Juni/Juli/August 1997): pp. 14-17. English translation by Pesch available on the internet: lava.ds.arch.tue.nl/GAILery/PraHA/tgehry.html

³³ In the language of Venturi and his associates, this would make the building a "duck" rather than a "decorated shed." Ducks are buildings where "the architectural systems of space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form. This kind of building-becoming-sculpture we call duck in honor of the duck-shaped drive-in, 'The Long Island Duckling,' illustrated in *God's Own Junkyard* by Peter Blake." Decorated sheds in Venturi's sense are buildings "where systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently of them." (Venturi, et al. *Learning from Las Vegas*, p. 163.) But the distinction presupposes that both ducks and decorated sheds are to be understood in terms of systems of space and structure serving the program, i. e. as functional sheds, which in the case of "ducks" are distorted by the aesthetic addendum, while in the case of "decorated sheds" are only dressed up or clothed by it. That is to say, both are "decorated sheds" in my broader sense.

³⁴ On the interesting in architecture, see Karsten Harries, "The Search for the Interesting," *The Meaning of Modern Art* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 49-60 and "Modernity's Bad Conscience," *AA Files*, no. 10, Autumn 1985, pp. 53-60.

³⁵ On "representation" and "re-presentation," see Karsten Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture*, pp. 118-133,

necessary to transform it into a remarkable aesthetic object. The cathedral, as a whole and with all its countless details, speaks to us of what it means to be a cathedral. Representing itself as a cathedral, it speaks to us also of what those who built it thought to matter in their lives, speaks to us, e. g., of death, genuine community, and of the promise of everlasting happiness. Into the ground of everyday buildings serving everyday needs it inserts a figure of utopia. Once the cathedral thus gathered individuals into a community by speaking of what was then thought to matter most. In that sense it is an obvious example of what Hegel considered the highest function of art. That highest function is served only when the aesthetic stands in the service the ethical. But, as I showed in my first lecture, just such service is refused by the aesthetic approach that has presided over the appreciation and production of art at least since the 18th century.³⁶ that approach tends towards an understanding of art as being for art's sake.

But is that quite right? Can the claim that there is a profound difference between a work of architecture such as Lincoln Cathedral and a modern high rise building, say Cesar Pelli's Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, really be supported? Do these Twin Towers not very much evoke thoughts of a modern cathedral, a cathedral raised, to be sure, not to God, but to the power of capital, the economic vigor of this society? Both the enormous height, and the aesthetic sensibility that gave these glass, steel, and concrete commercial office towers their distinctive shape, capture our attention, invite us to look at what we see in the image of the sacred architecture of the past, as an up to date version of some twin-towered cathedral that once had the power to gather some city into a genuine community by providing it with its spiritual center. Why should modern architecture not be able to do the same? Did Gropius not call on architects in his Bauhaus manifesto to furnish us with a modern cathedral? And do the Petronas Towers not meet that task? But lacking is the faith that built the cathedrals. The power of capital cannot be put in the place of the now absent God, for money has an essentially instrumental function. It is abused when its pursuit is made into an end. To be sure, the great architecture of the

³⁶ I say "at least," because although the aesthetic approach becomes dominant in Europe only in the 18th century, it is of course much older, aesthetic considerations helping to shape both the appreciation and the production, not only of art, but also of objects of use from the very beginning. But only in the early modern period does the end of art come to be located first of all in a purely aesthetic delight.

past, especially the sacred architecture of past centuries, remains available to architects who want to give their buildings an air of special importance, not just as a storehouse of significant forms, but also as a repository of meanings that even if no longer alive, yet retain at least traces of their former aura. Evoking a twin-towered cathedral façade, the Petronas Towers follow a by now time-honored convention of raising whatever buildings are deemed important in the image of Greek temples and Gothic cathedrals — think of the many government buildings, museums, and banks that have been built in the 19th and 20th centuries in the image of temples. And at my university, to give just one other example, libraries, a gymnasium, and even a power plant, were built quite literally in the image of gothic churches. But such use of the architecture of the past and the associated meanings is itself little more than an aesthetic gesture and lacks the power to restore these meanings to genuine life. In the end there is no very deep difference between an approach that builds a modern office tower in a way that invokes the great architecture of the past and, say, Calatrava's Turning Torso in Malmö, which looks instead to quite recent minimal sculpture. In either case the question presents itself: does the aesthetic object created by the architect and whatever meanings it communicates stand in an essential relationship to what the function of the building demands. To experience a building as a decorated sheds, is to experience the aesthetic addendum, whatever form it takes, however laden with meanings it may be, as contingent.

3

I have tried to explain what I mean by the expression “decorated shed.”³⁷ What then let's me call our modern epoch “the age of the decorated shed”? What I have in mind is more than the obvious fact that most of the important buildings rising today all over the world, many of them designed by the same small number of star architects, all of whom have developed a truly global practice, invite the label “decorated sheds.” Too often they strike us as clones of the same original.³⁸ All of them seem essentially mobile.

³⁷ For a fuller explanation, see Karsten Harries. *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 2-81.

³⁸ Consider what Baudrillard had to say about the Twin Towers before 9/11: “These two towers resemble two perforated bands. Today we'd probably say they're clones of each other, that they've already been cloned. Did they anticipate our present? Does that mean

This look of mobility is indeed to be expected, given an understanding of works of architecture as aesthetic objects: such objects are, I pointed out, essentially mobile. Such buildings no longer seem to belong to a particular place; they seem ready to travel. To return once more to Calatrava's Turning Torso: does it really belong to the Swedish Malmö, where it happens to stand? That the question must be answered in the negative is suggested by the fact that not just one, but two Turning Torso towers are supposed to rise in the American Las Vegas, two more in the Turkish Istanbul. And there is no reason why this should be the end, why there should not be yet another Turning Torso here in Shanghai.

But when I invite you to look at our age as the age of the decorated shed, I am thinking of something more essential than just the fact that "decorated shed" describes what works of architecture have to become in an age that understands works of art first of all as aesthetic objects, to be appreciated as such: the modern world itself invites understanding in the image of a decorated shed. By "world" I understand here not the totality of facts but the spiritual situation or framework that is presupposed by the way those attuned to our global post-industrial culture think and act, relate to things and to persons. In this sense — and I am aware that my description is a caricature, but an illuminating caricature I trust — we can be said to live in the age of the decorated shed. In choosing this expression I am thinking also of an essay by Martin Heidegger, who characterized our age as "the age of the world picture."³⁹ In that essay Heidegger was concerned with the threat the world picture that rules the modern world poses to our humanity. The aesthetic approach, as will become clearer in the following, may be understood as a response to this threat. But that response betrays the promise of art: understanding art first of all in aesthetic terms, it denies art its essential ethical function.

that architecture is not part of reality but part of the fiction of a society, and anticipatory illusion? Or does architecture simply translate what is already there"? (Jean Baudrillard and Jean Nouvel, *The Singular Objects of Architecture*, trans. Robert Bononno. Foreword K. Michael Hays [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002], p. 4) This was yesterday. Today we have to ask ourselves what to put in their place, what fiction it might serve, what reality it will translate.

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Die Zeit des Weltbildes," in *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), pp. 75-113.

Tending to reduce all art to decoration in the broadest sense, not just of our buildings, but of our lives, the age of the decorated shed threatens our humanity. Needed is a different art. I shall address that need in the final lecture.

4

Since my own understanding of the task of art in “the age of the decorated shed” developed in what has been literally a life-long dialogue with what Heidegger has to say about art and “the age of the world picture,” it is to his essay that I would now like to turn. Just what does Heidegger have in mind when he calls the modern age “the age of the world picture”? How illuminating is the metaphor of the “picture” on which Heidegger here relies? But before I address that question I would like to sketch briefly Heidegger’s fivefold characterization of this age of the world picture:

1. Our age is said to have its foundation in metaphysics.

What must seem to many a rather farfetched claim — perhaps an example of a philosopher overestimating the significance of his own discipline — becomes a bit more plausible when we consider the second characterization:

2. Today metaphysics finds its most visible expression in technology.

Here it can be said to have triumphed.

It is the significance of this triumph that we need to consider. The death of art in Hegel’s highest sense is a consequence of this triumph. Heidegger, too, links this death to the rise of what I have called the aesthetic approach. This is how we must understand his third characterization.

3. An aesthetic understanding of the work of art corresponds to this triumph.

If our age is indeed an age of science and technology, we should expect this to find expression in our buildings. But the very fact that we continue to value art shows that such an approach is felt to be deficient. Instrumental reason cannot satisfy our demands for meaning. That inability calls for an aesthetic supplement: technological thinking and the interest in decoration belong together. Precisely because science and technology cannot know anything of values — I shall have to return to this claim — human beings are led to look to art and culture to find there something to compensate them for what a

commitment to scientific objectivity and instrumental reason threatens to deny them. Nietzsche's saying in *The Will to Power* comes to mind, that we have art so that we would not perish over the truth.⁴⁰ And does the same not hold for what we call "culture"? Do art and culture not have today an essentially decorative function? This leads me to Heidegger's fourth characterization.

4. Culture becomes the custodian of what are taken to be the highest values.

Once that custodian was religion. But the evolution of our modern world has meant the progressive privatization of religion. The separation of church and state is a function of such privatization. Thus privatized, religion ceases to function as an effective custodian of the common sense or the values that are needed to hold a society together. Where then do we moderns find our highest values? An obvious answer is provided by our cultural inheritance. But that inheritance speaks with many different voices. How these are sorted out is increasingly an individual matter. But if so, how can culture take the place of religion? This leads me to Heidegger's fifth and final characterization:

5. Inseparably bound up with modern world picture is an understanding of reality that no longer has a place for God, gods, or the divine.

As will become clearer in the course of this lecture, I don't consider Heidegger's fivefold characterization of the age an adequate description: in everyone's experience there is much that does not fit what is here being claimed. What Heidegger here offers us is no more than a simple model that focuses on certain key aspects of the world we live in, but leaves out other important features. Or, we can say, what he offers us is a caricature. But if so, we must add, like any good caricature, it captures something essential and in this case deeply disturbing. What makes this caricature so disturbing is precisely the violence that what Heidegger describes as the age of the world-picture does to what we consider our humanity, presided over by our highest values. But this caricature would not be found disturbing by us, if we did not recognize that it captured something essential and all too familiar about our world.

⁴⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Aus dem Nachlaß der Achtziger Jahre," *Werke*, 3 vols., ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Hanser, 1966), vol. 3, p. 832.

5

Heidegger included “The Age of the World Picture” in a collection of essays to which he gave the title *Holzwege*, which could be translated as “Wood Paths” or “Paths that Lead Nowhere.” He first gave this lecture in 1938. At that time he gave it the somewhat different title “The Foundation of the Modern World Picture by Metaphysics.” That original title invites us to compare the modern world picture with others, possessing presumably different foundations. The original title thus suggests that every age has its own world picture. And can we not ask for the world picture of the Middle Ages or of the Greeks?⁴¹ World picture here means something like world-view. The revised title, however, claims something else, claims that the very attempt to understand the world as a picture helps to define our age, hinting at a connection between such an attempt and metaphysics. This suggests that while we moderns may inquire into the world picture of the Middle Ages, the medievals would not have done so. They did not experience their world as a picture. Just what is at stake?

The word “picture” offers a first answer: we can look at pictures, stand before them, but we cannot enter or leave them, cannot live or dwell in them. Pictures may include representations of persons. In this sense Leon Battista Alberti could say that pictures allow us to live even after our death. But it is of course not really we who live in such pictures. What we find in them is only a representation, a simulacrum. We cannot live in pictures. Pictures are not like buildings. They cannot be entered. What I said before of aesthetic objects holds especially of pictures: they are uninhabitable.

This suggests what is at stake in the phrase: “The Age of the World Picture.” To the extent that we understand the world as a picture, we stand before it, but have lost our place in it. In such a world we can no longer be said to dwell; in such a world we all tend to become displaced persons.

⁴¹ Martin Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), pp. 1-74. Trans. by Albert Hofstadter, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 17-87.

Such a displacement is demanded by science, which presupposes a self-elevation that transforms the embodied self into a disembodied thinker and observer. The medieval mystic Meister Eckhart appeals to such self-elevation when he writes, “Yesterday as I sat yonder I said something that sounds incredible: ‘Jerusalem is as near to my soul as this place is.’ Indeed a point a thousand miles beyond Jerusalem is as near to my soul as my body is, and I am as sure of this as I am of being human.”⁴² The commitment to objectivity that rules science is based on just such a self-elevation. There is indeed a sense in which to a scholar studying Israel Jerusalem is as close as whatever place he happens to find himself in. The transformation of the embodied self into a disembodied thinking substance, into a Cartesian *res cogitans*, lies at the very origin of philosophy, of metaphysics, and that is to say also at the origin of science. The scientist wants to see, wants to understand what is as it is, bracketing for the sake of such objectivity himself and his place in the world. This desire to just see and understand caused already Thales to tumble into his well. Absent-mindedness characterizes the very origin of philosophy and science. It is but the other side of that disinterested objectivity that we demand of all who lay claim to the pursuit of truth. A Cartesian *res cogitans* or thinking substance has no need for a house. And human beings who understand themselves first of all as such thinking subjects, who just happen to find themselves in some particular body, in a particular place and time, will not allow such particularities to circumscribe their freedom, but will consider all of this material to be fashioned into a successful life. In their essence they will be mobile. Such persons will still of course still require physical shelter and buildings that meet that need, but they will hardly expect architecture to meet their spiritual needs.

But let me return to the term “pictures.” We tend to think of pictures as representations. They refer to what they represent. Buildings, on the other hand, usually do not represent anything. We live and work in them. Houses thus offer both physical

⁴² *Meister Eckharts Predigten*, ed. and trans. Josef Quint, 3 vols. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1936-1976), “Adolescens, tibi dico: surge!” vol. 2, p. 305. *Meister Eckhart*, trans. Raymond B. Blakney (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 134. Cf. Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge<Mass.: MIT Press, 2001), especially pp. 160-183.

and spiritual shelter. Consider in this connection how Heidegger's essay would lead to very different expectations had he called it instead "The Age of the World Building." To understand the world in the image of a building, perhaps a house, invites thoughts of God as an architect, who created his work for us to enjoy and dwell in — think of the cosmos of the Timaeus or of the cosmos of the Christian Middle Ages: a divine architecture that placed human beings near the center. The world is understood here as presided over by a higher spirit, as a well ordered whole in which human beings have their proper places. The task of the architect might then be to imitate, to the best of his ability, this divine model. He would thus help us find our place in the world. His work, however, would not be a picture.

Not every representation is a picture. A stage set may represent some square without therefore becoming a picture. Could Heidegger have called his essay equally well "The Age of the World Theater"? That title would have led me to expect an essay on the world of the Baroque. The Baroque did find in the theater a key metaphor to describe the world into which individuals were born, in which they struggled and eventually died, where we should keep in mind that "theater" is a contrast term. In this respect it is like the word "dream," which demands the contrast with the way those, who are awake, experience reality. The word "dream" loses its meaning when so totalized that everything is said to be a dream. That is why we cannot carry out the Cartesian thought experiment that would make all that we experience but a dream. The same goes for the word "theater." We cannot say that all reality is but theater. Once the theater becomes all embracing it ceases to be theater. The Baroque "world-theater" presupposes thus the conviction that there is another higher world that we shall enter and witness when we step off that stage on which we are now actors. The Baroque theater sought to represent this world-theater in which we play our parts. Such representation had a double function: 1) By transforming the world-theater into spectacle, it established a distance between the individual and that theater, a distance that allowed him to enjoy this spectacle as a spectator, allowed him to forget, at least for a time, that he was also an actor in this play; 2) by representing the theater of the world as theater, it invited thoughts of that true reality, which lay beyond death. The Baroque theater is thus ruled by the uneasy conjunction of an at bottom still medieval conviction that art should open us to

what transcends and illuminates our life-world and an already modern understanding of art as an aesthetic object that in time lifts the burden of time, at least for a time.

I suggested that the Baroque especially invites characterization as the age of the world-theater. I do not have time here to show how the metaphor of the theater then affected all aspects of life: we still speak of theaters of war, of anatomical theaters.⁴³ And if the theater affected all of life, it also affected all the arts, especially architecture, and here again especially religious architecture: countless churches were then built in the image of a theater, where “theater” here refers first of all to a building in which actors perform for an audience. “Theater” may of course also refer to the performance.

6

When we speak of the theater of the Baroque, we should keep in mind that the Baroque theater is the product of a profound transformation of the theater. To put it simply: in the Baroque the theater, and not just the theater, but also architecture, comes increasingly under the hegemony of the picture. Understood as the age of the world-theater the Baroque period may indeed be understood as transitional, having its place between the medieval age of the world-building and the modern age of the world-picture.

But we should be more precise. The Baroque theater and also its architecture come not just under the hegemony of the picture, but under the hegemony of the picture ruled by what came to be called *perspectiva artificialis*. Leon Battista Alberti’s *On Painting*⁴⁴ helped inaugurate the rule of the picture so understood by teaching painters how to use a mathematical form of representation to create convincing simulacra of what appears as it appears, given a particular point of view. Such painting represents not the objects themselves, but inevitably perspective-bound appearances. These appearances have their measure in the perceiving eye. Here it is important to keep in mind the artificiality of such representation, the violence it does to the way we actually experience

⁴³ See Karsten Harries, “World-Picture and World-Theater: Wonder, Vision, Knowledge,” *Collection, Laboratory, Theater. Scenes of Knowledge in the 17th Century*, ed. Helmar Schramm, Ludger Schwarte, Jan Lazardzig (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2005), pp. 507-525.

⁴⁴ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. and intro. John R. Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale, 1956)

things. To put geometry in the service of his construction, Alberti thus assumes monocular vision and a flat earth. Given these assumptions, it is easy to come up with a proof of the correctness of Alberti's construction. Important here is this: for the sake of achieving a certain mastery of appearances, the perspectival art of Alberti subjects what it presents to a human measure that has itself been subjected to the demand for ease of representation. Artful pictorial illusion invites us to mistake it for reality and to forget its merely artificial being. Artifice substitutes simulacra for reality, as the artist usurps the place of God, substituting for God's creation his own. It is thus easy to understand the philosopher Jacques Maritain when he understands the single step that carries us in some museum from the rooms that hold the medieval primitives to those where we admire the masters of the Renaissance as a step that places us "on the floor of a theater."⁴⁵ We have crossed the threshold that separates anthropocentric modernity from the theocentric Middle Ages. And like Heidegger, Maritain, too, links modernity to the hegemony of the picture, for his "theater" is a theater ruled by Albertian perspective, that is to say by the picture so understood. It is a theater where the picture is allowed to triumph over what the theater once was.

That Alberti himself has already crossed the threshold that separates modernity from the Middle Ages, is shown by his rejection of the use of gold in painting. To understand what is at issue here we should consider the significance of the gold background that was introduced into Western painting just before 1000. Perhaps the only artistic innovation of comparable importance in the West was the stained glass window: together they furnished medieval art with two critical metaphors — "critical" in the sense that they allow us to approach the essence of this art. The gold background has metaphorical power, hints at eternal blessedness, as it invites us to look through representations drawn from the mundane to their timeless spiritual significance. It invites us to look at what we see from a "spiritual perspective."⁴⁶

Alberti's perspective also invites us to look through the material painting. Ideally the picture surface should appear as if transparent, a window through which we can see

⁴⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism, and the Frontiers of Poetry*, trans. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Scribner, 1962), p. 52.

⁴⁶ Friedrich Ohly, *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), pp. 15, 35-37.

whatever the painter has chosen to represent. But this is very much a human perspective, which has its center in the observer: what we see is appearance for us, is simulacrum, illusion. In this sense art can be said to open windows in the theater of the world, windows, not to a higher spiritual reality, but to illusions, to beautiful fictions that promise to compensate us for what reality denies us. The spiritual perspective of medieval art sought to open windows in the theater of the world to what was then believed to be true reality. Alberti's art is incompatible with this spiritual perspective. The turn to perspective here means a loss of transcendence, an embrace of illusion.

7

I have suggested that Alberti's *On Painting* (1435) helped to inaugurate what Heidegger calls the "Age of the World Picture." In his essay, to be sure, Heidegger was not thinking of Alberti. The person who is said by him to have inaugurated our "Age of the World Picture" is Descartes. But Cartesian method, I would like to suggest is anticipated by *perspectiva artificialis* and involves an analogous loss of transcendence. Consider the way that, for the sake of achieving a certain mastery of appearances, the perspectival art of Alberti subjects what is represented to a human measure that has itself been subjected to the demand for ease of representation. That latter demand is a presupposition of Alberti's embrace of mathematics. Similarly Cartesian method, for the sake of rendering us the masters and possessors of nature, subjects nature to a human measure that has itself been subjected to the demand for ease of comprehension. As the Albertian picture assumes an eye placed before and thus outside it, the Cartesian world-picture assumes an "I" placed before and thus outside it. The Cartesian *res cogitans* has thus no place in the world whose essence Descartes determines as *res extensa*. The subject has fallen, had to fall out of the world so understood. Science cannot know anything of such a thinking substance. All it can do is study brain processes and the like. It can attempt to model human beings with robots possessing complicated computer brains. But such robots remain human artifacts, machines, simulacra. That is to say, science as such knows nothing of persons deserving respect. So understood persons have no place in the scientific world-picture. As Wittgenstein says of the subject:

5.631 ... If I wrote a book 'the world as I found it,' I should also have therein to report my body and say which members obey my will and which do not etc. This then would be a method of isolating the subject or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject: that is to say, of it alone in this book mention could not be made.

5.632 The subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world.⁴⁷

That Wittgenstein, too, should speak of a world picture should come as no surprise (2.19). The human subject has to fall out of the modern world-picture.

What matters to me here is neither Alberti nor Descartes, neither Heidegger nor Wittgenstein, but a picture of the world that has to deny the human subject a place in that world. And that world-picture is a presupposition of our science, more precisely, of its demand for objectivity. It is of course easy to insist that this world-picture should not be confused with our life-world. But the correctness of this observation should not lead us to forget the extent to which our life-world is ever more decisively being transformed by technology. That transformation threatens to split the human being into object and subject, into human material, available to technological organization just like any other material. and into a subject that has to consider all material, including its own body and psyche as mere material to be shaped or played with as we see fit and our power permits. To the extent that our modern world has to transform us in the image of the Cartesian subject, it will make us ever more free, ever less bound to particular places, but that means also ever more mobile, rootless, and ghostly. Does such a subject still need architecture in the traditional sense? Was one function of such architecture not to grant a sense of place that we have come to recognize to be at odds with freedom? And does such a subject still need a world that will assign it its place and keep freedom responsible. Where in Heidegger's world picture is there room for what will bind freedom? But thus unbound freedom faces a mute, meaningless world. As, in their very different ways, both Wittgenstein and Heidegger recognize, the culmination of metaphysics in science and

⁴⁷ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), p. 151.

technology threatens to banish from the world all that might bind freedom, keep it responsible, and give weight and substance to our lives.

8

I claimed that Alberti helped to inaugurate the age of the world-picture, that his perspectival method foreshadows that of Descartes. Having said this, it is important to note that there are decisive differences between the picture Alberti had in mind and Heidegger's world-picture. The former is a painting, a work of art; it seeks to represent the appearance of just some small part of the world; and it seeks to represent it in such a way that a whole is created that by its perfection, its apparent self-sufficiency, entralls us in a way that for a time lets us forget the real world. The artwork allows us a vacation from reality. It provides for innocent pleasures that let us forget the cares and concerns that bind us to reality. In this respect Alberti's *On Painting* can be said to have anticipated the self-sufficiency of the artwork that the aesthetic approach to art came to insist on. So understood art turns its back on reality and on truth.

But Heidegger's world-picture does not turn its back on reality. Quite the opposite: it aims at a representation of the world that would include everything that deserves to be called real. For that very reason, it invites us to mistake this picture of the world for the world itself. In the language of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: this world-picture seeks to represent the world as it really is, "world" understood here as "everything that is the case," (1) or as "the totality of facts" (1.1). And it is not art, but science that promises a perspicuous and adequate picture of these facts. Newton provides Wittgenstein with an example.

6.341 Newtonian mechanics, for example, brings the description of the universe to a unified form. Let us imagine a white surface with irregular black spots. We now say: Whatever kind of picture these make I can always get as near as I like to its description, if I cover the surface with a sufficiently fine square network and now say of every square that it is white or black. In this way I shall have brought the description of the surface to a unified form. This form is arbitrary, because I could have applied with equal success a net with a triangular or hexagonal mesh. It

can happen that the description would have been simpler with the aid of a triangular mesh; that is to say, we might have described the surface more accurately with a triangular, and coarser, than with the finer square mesh, or vice versa, and so on. To the different networks correspond different systems of describing the world. Mechanics determine a form of description by saying: All propositions in the description of the world must be obtained in a given way from a number of given propositions — the mechanical axioms. It thus provides the bricks for the building of the edifice of science, and says: Whatever building thou wouldst erect, thou shalt construct it in some manner with these bricks and these alone.

Note that Wittgenstein begins this passage with a pictorial metaphor — reality is pictured as a page bearing irregular black spots. Science covers this picture with a network and proceeds to represent the original picture by filling in the proper areas, where we should keep in mind what is sacrificed here for ease of representation: the irregularity of the black spots which stand for what disinterested, unprejudiced observation determines to be the case. By its very project, science so understood tends to elide reality, tends to mistake reality for what it can represent. i. e. for its simulacrum. Descartes might have said, whatever deserves to be called real can, in principle at least, be thought clearly and distinctly. Our ability to comprehend things clearly and distinctly is here made the measure of reality. And it is therefore not surprising that in the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein elides that rift between reality and its scientific representation, to which his own picture calls our attention, when he identifies the world with the facts in logical space (1.13), instead of being content with another, more modest formulation: the scientific world-picture represents the facts in logical space (cf.2.11). The same elision of reality haunts what Heidegger calls the “Age of the World Picture.” “When we think of a ‘picture’ we think first of all of a representation of something. Accordingly the world-picture would be, so to speak, a picture of what is in its entirety. But ‘world-picture’ says more. We mean by this term the world itself, what is in its entirety, as it measures and binds us.”⁴⁸ To the world so understood we, too, belong, for it is said to include all that is. The

⁴⁸ Martin Heidegger, “Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” in *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), p. 89.

world-picture thus transforms itself into something like a house, into a building: a building with no outside, however — a prison perhaps? It is hardly surprising therefore that Wittgenstein should have begun the passage with a pictorial metaphor only to conclude it, quite in the spirit of Descartes, by likening the scientist to an architect. The shift is related to the shift in Heidegger's thinking from talk about the age of "The World Picture" to his later characterization of the modern age as the age of the *Gestell*, a quasi-architectural metaphor — the German suggests something like a supporting framework or scaffolding. Wittgenstein's scientist is a builder who uses for his building-blocks thoughts or propositions. His architecture is accordingly invisible. And is such invisibility not demanded of any representation of reality as it is? Colors, indeed all secondary qualities, characterize appearances, not the reality that appears. To ask what color is an electron is to ask the wrong sort of question. Instead of a pictorialization of reality, we can now speak of its objectification.

That such objectification has to transform that reality in which we find ourselves first of all and most of the time is evident: our first access to reality is always bound to particular perspectives, mediated by our bodies, colored by our concerns and interests. But as soon as we understand a perspective as such, in thought at least we are already beyond the limits it would impose. Such reflection on perspective and point of view leads inevitably to the idea of a subject that, free of all perspectives, sees things as they really are. This idea has to lead to an understanding of the reality that gives itself to our eyes, and more generally to our senses, as the mere appearance of an objective reality that no eye can see, no sense can sense, that only a rational thinking can reconstruct.

I suggested that Heidegger's world-picture has to transform itself into something like a world-building. But this is not to say that it is therefore like the medieval cosmos. This building is in no way like a house in which we can feel at home. That this should be so has its deepest foundation in the pursuit of truth that governs such world-building. Truth demands objectivity. And objectivity demands that we not allow our understanding to be clouded by our inevitably personal desires and interests. It wants just the facts. With good reason Wittgenstein can therefore say: "In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. In it there is no value — and if there were, it would

be of no value” (6.41). If there is something that deserves to be called a value, it will not be found in the world so understood. To find it we have to step outside that world. Earlier I called attention to Heidegger’s claim that the age of the world picture has its foundation in metaphysics. Metaphysics claims to comprehend the being of all that is. But we cannot comprehend what is fleeting. Metaphysics thus tends to think being against time. And we cannot comprehend what cannot be analyzed into simple elements and pictured by joining these elements. In this sense we really understand something only to the extent that we can make it. This is why Descartes promises a practical philosophy that will allow us to understand nature as distinctly as a craftsman understands what he is able to make. Understanding here means know-how. No surprise therefore that Heidegger should claim that metaphysics culminates in technology. And this culmination has to carry the self-displacement that is a presupposition of metaphysics back into our life-world; no surprise then either that that world, too, should be experienced ever more decisively as a world in which neither gods nor values are to be found. Both Wittgenstein and Heidegger know that the modern world-picture has no room for whatever it is that can make life meaningful. That must be sought outside that world, outside “all happening and being so,” which cannot help but be, as Wittgenstein put it, “accidental” (6.41).

But is this not to say that what makes life meaningful must be sought outside reality? And does not the work of art, which turns its back on that world in which accident rules, present us with beautiful fictions in which everything presents itself as being just as it should be, furnish us with just such an outside? Some such view is suggested by Kant’s definition of the beautiful as the object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction.⁴⁹ All interest, Kant claims, binds us to reality. To call the aesthetic experience disinterested is to say that it turns its back on reality. The aesthetic observer loses himself to beautiful illusion. Art offers him a refuge from reality. That is why

⁴⁹ We should note, however, that Kant himself, notwithstanding this definition of beauty, which quite a number of theorists of modern art have appropriated, had a very different understanding of art and its task. See especially *Critique of Judgment*, pars. 17, 43, 44, 45.

Heidegger can claim that the aesthetic approach to art helps to characterize the age of the world picture. Art so understood presents itself as the decoration of the Heideggerian Gestell. The age of the world picture becomes the age of the decorated shed.

9

I have tried to show that the very power over the world that our science and technology have granted us presupposes an understanding of reality that, while leaving art its beauty, yet cuts it off from reality. Art now offers us an escape from reality. But must we not, with Heidegger, demand more of art, demand that it open at least a window in our modern world, a window to what transcends his world picture? Is that not perhaps its special task today?

It is thus significant that in *Holzwege*, the collection of essays in which “The Age of the World Picture” first appeared, that essay is preceded by “The Origin of the Work of Art.”⁵⁰ The two essays belong together, one calling the other into question. And here it is significant that “architecture,” which is not mentioned in “The Age of the World Picture,” is at the very center of “The Origin of the Work of Art,” from two or three years before. The earlier essay includes Heidegger’s much cited description of a Greek temple, which is said by Heidegger to establish a world and to present the earth. With this work of architecture Heidegger would appear to give us his artistic paradigm: a work meant to illuminate the task, not just architecture, but all art faces just in this age of the world-picture, precisely because that age, as Hegel recognized, no longer would seem to have either room or need for such art.

It is indeed Hegel whom Heidegger challenges with his choice of this particular example. In his *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel had discussed architecture as humanity’s first attempt to give external reality to the divine, and that for Hegel means inevitably also to the spirituality that distinguishes humanity.

Architecture is in fact the first pioneer on the highway toward the adequate realization of the Godhead. In this service it is put to severe labor with

⁵⁰ Martin Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), pp. 1-74. Trans. by Albert Hofstadter, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), pp. 17-87.

objective nature, that it may disengage it by its effort from the confused growth of finitude and the distortion of contingency. By this means it levels a space for the God, informs His external environment, and builds Him his temple, as a fit place for the concentration of Spirit, and its direction to the absolute objects of intelligent life. It raises an enclosure for the congregation of those assembled, as a defense against the threatening of the tempest, against rain, the hurricane, and savage animals. It in short reveals the will thus to assemble, and although under an external relation, yet in agreement with the principles of art.⁵¹

Much of what we find in Hegel's account is taken up by Heidegger. But that the Hegelian account has been radically rewritten is also evident. Most importantly, nothing in Hegel's description answers to what Heidegger points to when he insists that "The Work lets the earth be an earth."⁵² Hegel has a much more oppositional understanding of architecture: the temple's builders impose a spiritual, and that means for Hegel a truly human order on a recalcitrant material. When they level the ground, break the stone, raise walls and columns, human beings assert and celebrate their humanity in the face of an initially indifferent environment. They defend themselves against nature, not only or even primarily against its physical threats — such defense is the task of more modest building — but against its contingency. In this struggle they rely on and exhibit the power of the spiritual and universal. That is why architecture is in its very essence not the work of isolated individuals, but belongs to the community.

Architecture, and more generally art, is here assigned a place in the story of the spirit's progress. This progress has its telos in humanity's complete appropriation of the earth, an appropriation that has to break down the walls that separate persons, races, and regions, as it has to subject the earth to the rule of technology. As Hegel understands it, this progress also has to leave behind, first architecture, that "first pioneer on the highway

⁵¹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik, Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. Hermann Glockner (Stuttgart: Fromann, 1937), vol. 12, p. 125. trans. F. P. B. Osmaston, "Selections from The Philosophy of Fine Arts," *Philosophies of Art and Beauty*, ed. Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1976), p. 439.

⁵² Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes," p. 32; trans. p. 46.

toward the adequate realization of the Godhead," and finally all art that claims to express humanity's deepest interests. Do not science and technology provide us with a far more complete mastery of the earth than art can ever provide? Is it not reason alone that in the end should bind freedom?

The question is whether reason alone can bind freedom, whether this Kantian hope to which Hegel remains committed, is not, as Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche suspected, itself supported, not by reason, but by remnants of the old faith left in ruins by the progress of reason. Hegel could accept the death of art in its highest sense so cheerfully only because of his faith in reason. Heidegger had lost such faith, as he had lost faith in the old God. And that twofold loss led him, as it had led Nietzsche before him, to attempt a return to a modern version of what Hegel has considered art in its highest sense and to reclaim the ethical function of art for the present.

As the "Epilogue" to "The Origin of the Work of Art" clear, Heidegger's essay thus means to call Hegel's understanding of the death of art into question, even as Heidegger grants that Hegel is supported by the shape of the modern world-picture. But Heidegger would have us take a step beyond that world-picture. He thus questions the Cartesian promise that our reason will render us the masters and possessors of nature and thereby transform our earth into a genuine home. Heidegger cannot recognize in the so transformed earth what deserves to be called a home. Convinced that we moderns have to learn once again to "let the earth be an earth," something that neither technology nor science can teach us, he returns in "The Origin of the Work of Art" to architecture, to the art with which Hegel lets the spirit's progress begin. Heidegger returns to it to suggest that the challenge of that beginning does not lie behind us, as Hegel had thought, but ahead of us, as a future challenge. That such a refusal to accept the finality of Hegel's judgment not only reclaims for art its ethical function, but also invites disaster will be the subject of the next lecture.

3. The Golden Calf

1

In my last lecture I spoke of the look of mobility that characterizes so much that gets built today. Buildings no longer seem to belong to a particular place: even if in fact firmly fixed in place, they seem ready to travel. And does this appearance of mobility not reflect our modern mode of dwelling. Consider the way railroad, car, and airplane, telephone, television, and the electronic revolution have liberated us from what one can call the tyranny of place. Has the internet not made the world our home? Once the place where someone happened be born tended to circumscribe what that person would become, whom he or she would marry, what occupation he or she would pursue. Place was destiny. The ongoing revolution in transportation and telecommunication is changing all that, where the spiritual significance of such change remains obscure.

Must we not welcome the way the sheltering power of place is giving way to a modern version of a fluid, nomadic way of life?⁵³ Must we not celebrate the liberating power of open space and its promise of freedom? But the seductive lure of such freedom is shadowed by a sense that we have lost something important; the ever-expanding rule of technology over our life-world is accompanied by discontent. Such discontent finds characteristic expression in Martin Heidegger's nostalgia-laden rhetorical question: "Is there still that quiet dwelling of man between earth and sky? Does the meditative spirit still preside over the land? Is there still home that nourishes roots, in whose soil the human being ever stands, i. e., is rooted?"⁵⁴ In ever-different forms such laments, too, have become part of our spiritual situation.

We may want to object: why should there be such rootedness? Must we not call into question Heidegger's nostalgic longing for Black Forest farmhouse, field-path, and bell-tower? Do we not all know what we owe to a technology that has come to define our life-world? Finally nothing less than our modern freedom, which importantly includes freedom from the tyranny of place. To be sure, I, too, find it difficult at times

⁵³ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, trans, Brian Massumi , *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁵⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1959), p. 17.

not to mourn the way things and the earth have been neglected or, worse, violated by technology, the way our global economy is invading and destroying traditional societies and their place-bound way of life, but would I trade my modern or postmodern mobility for a more settled way of life? Nothing prevents me from doing just that. That I refuse such a trade tells a great deal about what I value.

The other side of our freedom, to be sure, is our rootlessness. I understand Heidegger's lament that "All the things, with which modern communications technology constantly stimulates, assaults, and presses human beings, are today already much closer to us than the field surrounding the farm, the sky over the land, the hourly passage of night and day, closer than habit and custom in the village, closer than the tradition of our native world."⁵⁵ But I also know that the world we live in makes such sentences sound dated: every year the number of those who still live on some farm, surrounded by its fields decreases. And are computer and television, car and airplane not much closer to those truly of this modern age than "the field surrounding the farm, the sky over the land"? Such proximity has granted us a freedom not known to the village-dwelling peasant. And who of us, who has enjoyed such freedom, does not know that we would become homeless in our modern world, were we to attempt to keep our distance from technology? Do we not have to embrace technology if we are to find our own ground and soil to stand on? Is it not precisely the nostalgia for reservations beyond the reach of technology that would let us become homeless, were we to surrender to it?

To be sure, many of us not only dream now and then of some pre-technological mode of existence, but take steps to escape for a time to such a way of life. Heidegger thus liked to retreat to his hut in the Black Forest. But most of us know better than to allow such dreams and escapes to rule our lives. And it is not only the way of life we have chosen for ourselves that forbids us such a step, but also, and more importantly, our responsibility for others. Just think of all that technology has accomplished and still needs to accomplish: of agriculture, e. g., or of medicine. What then are we, having entered the third millennium, to make of Heidegger's assertion that technology today threatens "the rootedness of man in its innermost essence"?⁵⁶ Does technology not offer

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 18.

us a new home, an altogether new kind of rootedness? Think of the many young people today who have grown up with the computer. Will they not simply dismiss Heidegger's claim "that here, by means of technology, an attack on the life and the essence of the human being prepares itself, compared with which the explosion of the hydrogen bomb means little"?⁵⁷ I shall return to that claim in the final lecture.

Here I want to repeat the counter-question: do we even need roots? Are human beings like turnips, stuck in the ground? Heidegger would have us tie what deserves to be called "dwelling" to what he calls a saving of the earth that neither wants to master, nor wants to exploit it, to a receiving of the sky that lets day be day, that lets night be night — and I confess that I share his unhappiness with the still rising flood of artificial light that makes it ever more difficult for today's city dwellers to see the stars and the milky way⁵⁸

But we make things too easy for ourselves when we insist that the progress of reason, of which the progress of science and technology are perhaps the most significant, but by no means the only expression, will inevitably transform our earth with its ever more scarce resources into a home that will do justice both to our and our children's demands for security, for physical and spiritual shelter, and to our demand for freedom. Is Heidegger not right to raise questions concerning the emancipatory promise of technology? The closer human beings come to fulfilling the Cartesian promise of rendering themselves the masters and possessors of nature, the less they will be able to experience nature as a power that assigns them their place. Much more disturbing is our increasingly successful attempt to assert ourselves as masters and possessors of our own nature, an attempt that has been furnished by modern medicine with means that make thoughts of remaking oneself much more than just an idle dream. Understood as material for the progress of technology, neither nature, nor our own nature, can furnish us with a measure. Unless we ourselves can establish the goal and limits of that progress, that progress has to lose its way in what knows neither limit nor measure. But how are we too think of such establishment?

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁸ Cf. Hans Blumenberg, *Die Vollzähligkeit der Sterne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), p. 33.

If in such questioning our technological civilization's discontent finds voice, it all too often also betrays something like an aestheticizing of the lamented loss that is not without its own special pleasure: one distances oneself from the power said to threaten "the rootedness of man in its innermost essence," but makes no attempt to effectively challenge that power. One laments the rootlessness of our existing, the growing uniformity of a world ever more tightly embraced by the new technology, conjures up visions of past, supposedly more humane times, or hopes to discover in the wisdom of other cultures impulses that may open some new path. In traces of lost meaning we seek compensation for what we experience as the poverty of the present age.

For some time now the suspicion that we have lost our way and direction has shadowed our civilization. The young Nietzsche spoke in *The Birth of Tragedy* of "the disaster slumbering in the womb of theoretic culture."⁵⁹ Today we may even find some consolation in such talk: the slumbering disaster still leaves us some time — enough time perhaps to find the means to avert the disaster that has been prophesied. But where are we to look for these means? Heidegger's attempt to oppose to instrumental reason meditative thinking, seems to offer little more than an intellectual vacation from the reality in which we live. It invites a kind of inner emigration that takes its leave from the technological world — teleologically suspends it, Kierkegaard might have said — even as it allows that world to enter our everyday, gladly accepts the many ways in which it has made our lives easier, but yet keeps its distance in order to thus save the essence of human being. The question is whether we can afford such a salvation: does Heidegger's broken "yes" and "no" not lead into a philosophic counterpart to the compensatory aesthetic response to reality discussed in the last lecture?

We hear today of the illegitimate hegemony of scientific, objectifying reason. But do we know how to distinguish between false hegemony and legitimate rule? Many today oppose to the objectifying reason that rules in science the power of the artistic imagination, communicating itself in stories and images. It is supposed to give us access to long buried but vital dimensions of reality. But can and should we take the imagination that seriously? Does the understanding of reality presupposed by our science

⁵⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 112.

and technology, that understanding to which our own reason has led us, not deny this? To be sure, we must take care not to allow instrumental thinking to circumscribe our lives, have to learn how to limit its rule. But we must also take care not to allow opposition to such thinking to let us trade the only reality we know for a merely imagined reality. Was Hegel not right? Does that reason that rules our science and technology and increasingly also our lives not deny us the refuge of edifying images and stories? If we are to effectively challenge objectifying, calculating reason, we first have to recognize the ground of its legitimacy. Only then can we attempt to determine the boundaries of the realm in which it rightly rules and perhaps open up a space beyond that realm that may perhaps allow art to regain something of what was once its mythical power. I shall return to this possibility in my final lecture.

2

It would be a mistake to understand that modern rootlessness lamented by Heidegger simply as a function or a result of our technology. As I pointed out in the last lecture, the progress of technology only carries an uprooting into our everyday that is inseparable from the understanding of reality that rules our science. That understanding rests on a twofold reduction of the world in which we find ourselves caught up first of all and most of the time. A first reduction — we can speak of a pictorialization of reality — turns the world into a picture, the human being into a mere observer. Science presupposes a conviction that reality will uncover its secrets only to those who are able to bracket their all too human interests and cares. Such bracketing transforms the things that engage, enthrall and appall us, into objects of a pure sight. At the origin of philosophy, and that is to say also at the origin of science, we find thus the pleasure Thales took long ago in just observing the starry sky above, a spectacle that would seem to have had little to do with what concerned his fellow Greeks: what did the stars matter to mortals?

The understanding of reality that rules our science presupposes also a second reduction. Instead of a pictorialization of reality, we can now speak of its objectification. Let me explain: our first access to reality is always bound to particular perspectives. How things present themselves depends on our situation, on the place that nature and

society, body and language, space and time have assigned us. Often we remain so caught up in these perspectives that they remain unquestioned. But as soon as we understand a perspective as such, in thought at least we are already beyond the limits it would impose. Our thoughts are free. This freedom will not allow itself to be bound to particular points of view. It knows no roots, leaps beyond every barrier one would erect, and leads to the ever repeated demand for a less place-bound access to things, for an ever less perspectival form of representation, that is to say, for an ever more objective representation of things. What allows us to rank our science above its Aristotelian predecessor is first of all the fact that it answers more fully to these demands. This higher rank has to bring with it the devaluation of imaginative thought and the elevation of calculative thinking. To see things perspectively is to see only the appearances things present to our eyes. Such reflection on perspective and point of view leads inevitably to the idea of a subject that, free of all perspectives, sees things as they really are — God is supposed to know things in that way. This idea reduces the reality that gives itself to our eyes, and more generally to our senses to the mere appearance of a reality that no eye can see, no sense can sense, that only a rational thinking can reconstruct. The understanding of reality on which our science and technology rest, an understanding that demands objectivity of those who lay claim to truth, is tied to this idea of a pure subject, made into a regulative ideal.

Inextricably bound up with such an objectification of reality is the gulf that now has to open up between the real and the visible. And not only does such reflection force us to understand what presents itself to our senses as the appearance of a reality that remains invisible; but what can appear to us at all is only the tiniest fragment of the whole of reality. The finite speed of light alone is sufficient to establish this. The essential invisibility of reality supports those who claim with Hegel that art, from the side of its highest vocation, is for us moderns a thing of the past. For that highest vocation was tied to its ability to disclose reality in a way not open to reason. Art, too, then was thought a uniquely privileged part of the pursuit of truth. The understanding of reality that I have sketched here has to deny art that vocation.

But the other side of the objectification of reality is that rootlessness of which I spoke in the beginning of this lecture. The pursuit of objectivity demands that the human

knower transcend that situation which binds perception and knowledge to a particular place and a particular time, demands the transformation of the knower into a Cartesian thinking subject. Such a thinking subject cannot have roots. Descartes' *Meditations*, which led him to interpret the human essence as *res cogitans*, help us understand the essential homelessness of modern man. Not that the concretely existing human being ever experiences him- or herself as such a *res cogitans*. But again and again we measure our concrete being in the world by the idea of a subject that would understand things as they are. This idea lets recognize our own existing as only possible, a quite improbable accident. We moderns live on earth *sub specie possibilitatis*, restless, without a permanent home. And that restlessness has its foundation in a self-assertion that would have us see as God is supposed to see.

We should not overlook one thing in this connection: the idea of an absolute subject may furnish our understanding with a measure, but we possess no intuition that corresponds to that measure. We do not see like God. All our experiencing remains bound to particular situations, particular perspectives. This means that our perceptions and intuitions will never satisfy what truth so understood demands, that our experience of reality does not yet give us genuine insight, that we have to work for such insight. Only in the re-constructions of our own spirit does nature yield her secrets.

We may want to object that reality here is confused with a merely human construction, that science, too, settles for mere appearance. Must that twofold reduction I have sketched not deny us access to the life-world and thus contact with what alone deserves to be called reality and is the source of all our meanings and values? For the sake of life, must we not break the hegemony of natural science by revealing its art character? Thus Nietzsche dared — raising and by the same stroke undermining Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* — to "view science from the vantage point of the artist, art under that of life."⁶⁰ So understood, the scientist, too, is an artist, even if he has to forget this if he is to understand himself as the servant of truth. With his concepts he would imprison the imagination. But the imagination refuses to be thus imprisoned in the architecture raised by objective thought. The human urge to metaphor formation now

⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Versuch einer Selbstkritik," in *Werke*, ed. Karl Schlechta (München: Hanser, 1966), vol. 1, p. 11.

turns to other realms, to myth and to art.⁶¹ Nietzsche demands here the liberation of poetic intuition. His critique of science and of its claim to truth would serve such liberation.

But we must not make things too easy for ourselves. Appealing to what not long ago was called the new philosophy of science, many humanists today still console themselves with a relativizing of science that would blur the fundamental opposition between science and myth, science and art. Faced with a technology that would seem to recognize no limits, that threatens to crush humanity in its embrace, it is comforting to hear that science does not really represent nature as it is, that it too traffics only with models, conjectures, abstract metaphors that can claim no necessity and permit countless others. Does the reflection on science and its special point of view not deny any absolutization of that point of view? Must such considerations not call into question the faith that the twofold reduction of reality that I sketched above offers us the key to nature's secrets, a faith that supports our modern world picture?

As the world in which we live demonstrates, Nietzsche's critique was unable to shake that faith. And equally impotent has been the critique of his many successors. We don't do justice to science when we understand it as just another intellectual game, subject to the indicated twofold reduction. Descartes' promise of a practical philosophy that would let us understand the power and ways of nature just as we understand the different techniques employed by our craftsmen was much more than just an idle promise.⁶² To understand something here means to be able to make it. Only in technology does science so understood complete itself. The modern understanding of nature does not rest content with that twofold distancing from the life world I have indicated. As technology it returns to and reenters the life world. Modern science is not the contemplation of the starry sky in which a Thales found a quasi-aesthetic pleasure, but work. The model here is not the idle God of Aristotle, but the creator God of the Bible, who so often was thought in the image of an architect.

⁶¹ "Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn," *Werke*, vol. 3, p. 319.

⁶² René Descartes, *Discourse on Method 6*, in *The Philosophical Works*, trans. Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (New York: Dover, 1955), vol. I, p. 119.

In the preceding lecture I cited Nietzsche's statement in *The Will to Power* that we have art so that we would not perish over the truth.⁶³ Already in *The Birth of Tragedy* we find the repeated assertion that without beautiful illusion human beings would not be able to bear reality. Art is to deliver us from the feeling that our existence lacks meaning. Something similar can be said of the aesthetic approach to art that I discussed in the first two lectures. Deliverance here meant an escape from reality into the realm of beautiful illusion. Nietzsche on the other hand resists such a flight and demands that art embrace reality and with this embrace render it meaningful. Only when thus transfigured into an aesthetic phenomenon, the young Nietzsche claimed, does our everyday reality, does our existence appear forever justified.⁶⁴ Only the artist, he claimed, gives dignity and meaning to human life.

Nietzsche, too, is well aware that the understanding of reality presiding over our enlightened technological age has no place for such an art, an art strong enough to found a shared ethos. Just because of this, our modern age is, as Heidegger was to repeat after Nietzsche, the age of an ever-growing nihilism. As we have seen, the very power over the world that our science and technology have granted us, presupposes an understanding of reality, if you wish an ontology, that while leaving art its beauty, yet has to cut it off from the truth. The artistic treasures we have inherited, which still testify to what was art's power to establish genuine community, have been reduced to objects of a merely aesthetic interest. If, as Nietzsche demands and hopes, art really is to turn once again into myth, if pictures and stories are to regain their former ethical power, then, as he recognized, the hegemony of rational thinking must first be challenged and broken. It was in order to accomplish this that the young Nietzsche sought to unmask the faith in the power of reason that supports such hegemony as a mere superstition. What is that for a truth that science claims? "A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms — in short, a sum of human relations that are elevated, translated,

⁶³. Friedrich Nietzsche, "Aus dem Nachlass der achtziger Jahre," *Werke*. 3 vols. ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Hanser, 1966), vol. 3, p. 832.

⁶⁴ *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, 5, *Werke*, vol. 1, p. 40.

and decorated poetically and rhetorically and which after long use seem firm, canonic, and binding to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which have become worn and lost their sensuous power, coins that have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins."⁶⁵ How good this has sounded to many who have recognized the nihilistic implication of the understanding of reality that science has to presuppose. Science is here moved in the neighborhood of art, only that it is said to be poorer in that it has to dissolve pictures with sensuous power into pale concepts; also less honest, more ignorant, in that the scientist forgets that his reality is the product of his own artistic doing. Humanists, disturbed by the hegemony of science, may find consolation in such considerations that would raise the Copernican reflection that geocentrism rests on no more than an anthropocentric illusion that lets us place this earth we happen to find ourselves on at the center, to a yet higher level by showing that post-Copernican science, too, remains caught in an anthropocentric illusion that would make our human understanding the measure of reality. Should insight into the self-deception that supports science not free us from its power? Quite a number of postmodern thinkers have thus claimed Nietzsche as one of their own. But this is false consolation, no effective counter to the ever progressing power of science and technology, because origin and essence of this power remain ill understood. The young Nietzsche sought the origin of this power in the Socratic faith "that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being, but even of correcting it."⁶⁶ The step back to the mythic art of Greek tragedy and its understanding of reality was to become the step that would return to art that ethical function Plato had denied to it long ago, that modernity still has to deny it. Thus it would become a step forward, to the saving, healing art-work of the future, which would replace the ghostly reality conjured up by our science with a reality that would once again be full of color and life, an intoxicating Dionysian reality that would mean a new health.

⁶⁵ "Über Wahrheit und Lüge," *Werke*, vol 3, p. 314. Trans. Walter Kaufman, "On Truth and Lie." *The Portable Nietzsche*, (Hamondsworth: Penguin, 1976), pp. 46-47.

⁶⁶ *Die Geburt der Tragödie, Werke*, I, p. 84. Trans. Walter Kaufmann, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 95.

As Nietzsche was soon forced to recognize, such Wagnerian talk of the art-work of the future can only provide the neediness that gave rise to it, with another aesthetic cover — in the end, despite all his hopes, not so very different from the decorated sheds of the 19th century, which liked to cover the poverty of the age with borrowed ornament. An impatient hope here leads to too easy, precipitous formulations that cannot change a reality that not only Nietzsche experienced as profoundly deficient. To be sure, just this sense of the deficiency of the age made many receptive to *The Birth of Tragedy's* seductive power: today we appreciate it much as we appreciate a poem or a musical performance, say of Wagner's *Ring*. But like everything aesthetic, such enjoyment relies on a bracketing of reality and of the demands it makes on us. Today Nietzsche's later self-critical postscript to the *Birth of Tragedy* may have more to teach us than that book itself. In that book an aestheticizing thinking attempts to embrace science in order to deny it its power. But does not, what presents itself as an attack, turn out to be, like all aestheticizing, in fact a flight? I am concerned here, not so much with *The Birth of Tragedy*, as with the type it represents. Dreams of an embrace of reality by art have proven again and again just that: mere dreams.

4

But is that really right? Is it not possible to conceive an aestheticizing of this technological world that will not just decorate that world, but allow human beings to once again feel truly at home in it? Only today we should not expect poets, musicians, or philosophers to bring about such a transformation of reality: architects and politicians are better candidates. To return to an example from the last lecture: Gropius founded the Bauhaus in order to return to architecture its ethical function. Architecture was to lead the different arts away from their "self-sufficient distinctiveness" back to a unity that not only would once again embrace them all, but also and at the same time, overcome the separation of art from reality. The architect would shape the space and time of everyday experience in such a way that individuals are recalled from the dispersal into which they are led by the modern world to an order that would allow them to recognize once again their place and vocation. "Structures created by practical requirements and necessity do not satisfy the longing for a world of beauty built anew from the bottom up, for the

rebirth of that spiritual unity which ascended to the miracle of the Gothic cathedrals."⁶⁷ This vision of a no longer just aesthetic, but community building architecture recalls the expectations that once bound Nietzsche to Wagner. In both cases what was hoped for remained unrealized. I want so say, fortunately could not be realized. For should it become reality, such a work would have to assign the individual his or her place in such a way that such an individual would become part of an aesthetic whole and thus receive his or her meaning. But to become such a part, human beings must give up their freedom and thus their essence. What makes this vision a nightmare is the power of a technology that suggests possibilities of manipulating human material in a way that would make it impossible to still speak of an autonomous subject. Think of the power photography, film, television, and now the computer haven given those able to control such media, be they businessmen or politicians. It is easy to imagine an artist who finds in the new communications technology a far more encompassing and effective medium than Gropius ever found in architecture, an artist who would use for his matter human beings. In such an art technology and aesthetics would truly embrace one another to crush humanity.

We might want to appeal to Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* to defend such an embrace. Does it not provide a defense against the so difficult to bear truth that reality has no meaning, that God is dead, that in the world value is not to be found? Was Nietzsche no perhaps right when he insisted that only as an aesthetic phenomenon can reality, can our existence be justified. Implied by this claim, is another: that human beings as such lack dignity. *The Birth of Tragedy* thus speaks of the dignity of man and the dignity of work as empty clichés.

According to Kant and Schiller human beings have dignity, *Würde*, only in so far as they are more than merely natural beings, are also noumena: as free and responsible agents, human beings were thought to transcend their own natural being. But does that even make sense given the modern understanding of reality? Does that understanding not force us to naturalize human beings in a way that has to deny them, too, any supposedly given meaning? But if so, is it not only the aesthetic re-presentation of human beings that can give them dignity? Only the work of artistic genius, Nietzsche thus insists in *The Birth of Tragedy*, can justify life. This means that human beings, if they are to

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 46.

experience their lives as worthwhile, must serve art in one of two ways: either by becoming geniuses themselves or by subordinating themselves to the work of some genius. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche understood Wagner as such a genius. And Wagner is indeed the artist who more than any other presides over the art of the European nineteenth century and presides still, not just over much of the art, but also much of the politics of the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries. We are not done with him. The attempt to aestheticize the life-world inevitably lets the artist become a politician. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's Wagner and Hitler films are significant in this connection.

There is a sense in which Nietzsche and Wagner also preside over Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art." Thus Heidegger, too, taking his cues from Plato and Aristotle, once understood the state as a work of art and sought the "inner truth and greatness" of National Socialism in the attempt to repeat the art-work of the Greek polis in a form in keeping with this age of technology.⁶⁸ Here, too, the artist become statesman is to master reality in such a way that it will once again present itself as an order in which each individual can find his proper place. Once again chaos it to become cosmos.

To do justice to Heidegger we would have to distinguish the reality that he so disastrously misunderstood from what he read into that reality, would have to consider carefully the distinction he drew then between our aestheticizing art and what he took to be true art, which is said by him not only to establish a world, i.e. an order that lets us experience, as religion was able to do, persons and things as parts of a meaningful whole, but also to present the earth, i. e. to keep us open to what transcends and resists all human establishing and therefore every such order. The former, as I shall show is far more problematic than the latter. We would have to consider once more the way our modern understanding of reality and the aestheticizing of art belong together. As we have seen, to the extent that art is ruled by the aesthetic approach, the artwork must keep its distance from reality. We, especially the artists among us, may want to challenge this distance between art and reality, which would seem to render art ineffectual. But should art succeed, as Wagner, Nietzsche, and Heidegger hoped, in overcoming this distance and

⁶⁸ See especially Alexander Schwan, *Politische Philosophie im Denken Heideggers*, 2nd revised ed., (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989 and Karsten Harries, "Heidegger as a Political Thinker," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1976, pp. 644-669.

establish a world, would reality not have to lose its reality and become its own simulacrum? Would human beings not have to lose their humanity and become mere human material?

6

In “The Origin of the Work of Art” Heidegger dreams, like so many of his contemporaries, of a world-establishing art able to reveal to human beings what needs to be done and thus able to gather them, even in this modern age, once more into a genuine community. Heidegger claims that it is in the very nature of great art to be an origin, a beginning: “Whenever art happens — that is whenever there is a beginning — a thrust enters history, history either begins or starts over again. History means here not the sequence in time of events of whatever sort, however important. History is the transporting of a people into its appointed task as entrance into that people’s endowment.”⁶⁹

Heidegger first gave the lecture on “The Origin of the Work of Art” on November 13, 1935 to the *Kunstwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft* in Freiburg four days before Hitler had given a powerful demonstration of what such a thrust might mean in the 20th century in Munich. Robert Jan van Pelt has given us an eloquent description of the events of November 9 and of the way art served the ceremonies of that day, which centered on a procession, at its center the Blood Flag, a flag that in 1923 had fallen into the blood of one of the putschists killed in that failed coup and which had now been elevated into a sacred relic, as indeed the whole event mimicked a sacred ceremony. Such ceremonies require an architectural frame. Hitler understood very well the political potential of art, especially of film — and of architecture, and so he commissioned the architect Ludwig Troost to transform the city into a worthy setting of the new national cult. The route that the Nazis had walked in 1923 became the spine of the urban redevelopment of Munich. It consisted of two parts with three nodes. At the beginning was the first sacred place, the Beer Hall, where the annual procession was to start exactly at 11.00 AM. From there the

⁶⁹ Martin Heidegger, “Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes,” *Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977). Trans. by Albert Hofstadter, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 77.

route to the Feldherrnhalle was marked with 240 pylons, each honoring one of the 240 men who had died in the struggle against the German state and the enemies of the Volk between November 9, 1923 and January 30, 1933. The Feldherrnhalle was a second sacred place. There a monument was erected in honor of the sixteen principal martyrs of the movement. Until that point the elements referred literally to the historic events of 1923. However, the march had gone further in a spiritual sense, leading to the new Germany that had been instituted January 30, 1933. Thus the processional road was extended from the Feldherrnhalle until it reached the splendid neoclassical Königsplatz at the other side of the old city. This square, the termination of the cultic route and the third sacred place, was to represent the Third Reich. At the point where the processional road, the Briennerstrasse, met the Königsplatz, two “Doric” Temples of Honor were erected, open to the sky. Each was to contain eight coffins. Flanking them monumental party buildings were erected along the Arcisstrasse, revealing the essential unity between the sacrifice of the sixteen in 1923, which formed the basis of the political constitution of the Nazi movement, and the instruments through which the Führer absorbed the nation in the constitution of the movement and his own person. As the architectural historian Robert Jan van Pelt remarks,

The buildings were an instant success. The party ideologist Alfred Rosenberg applauded them as “the first attempt to realize the ancient Greek ideal.” The architectural critic Wilhelm Lotz praised the transformation of the Königsplatz because it showed for the first time in the modern age that “a deeper meaning can dwell in a city-square” as long as its origin is a spiritual principle and not a desire for aesthetic variety in the built-up area of a merely decorative intention. The Königsplatz had shown that it is still possible to create an architecture that emerges from inner principles of dedication and value instead of being derived from external contingencies of use.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Robert Jan van Pelt, “Apocalyptic Abjection,” in Robert Jan van Pelt and Carroll William Westfall, *Architectural Principles in the Age of Historicism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 328-329.

A reader of Heidegger's "Origin of the Work of Art" would have had little difficulty understanding such praise. Had Hegel's dire pronouncements about the future of art and architecture not been refuted and not by philosophy but by architecture, by just that art the progress of spirit was supposed to have most decisively left behind? In retrospect it is easy to understand why an architectural theorist like van Pelt would have felt just the opposite: that his own convictions about architecture had been proven untenable by what Heidegger had theorized and what Hitler and his architects had achieved.

Heidegger's vision of National Socialism certainly applies to architecture. A comparison of the different domains of ancient Athens and the foci of architectural activity in the Third Reich offers a premonition of this awful truth; an effort to match the Attic theatre with its Nazi counterpart transforms presentiment into unambiguous certitude. This conclusion wreaked havoc with my own project and led to repudiation and capitulation. In short the attempt to rediscover architectural principles in an age of historicism led to the ineluctable conclusion that Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) had realized the program of renewal proposed in the odd chapters of this book [written by van Pelt].⁷¹

Was van Pelt justified in drawing this conclusion? Did Hitler in fact realize the program suggested and called for in Heidegger's essay? Or is there something incompatible between what Heidegger has to say and what was carried out in Munich and elsewhere? Do the architecture of Troost and Speer, the sculpture of Thorak and Breker, the painting of Ziegler and Eber, realize what in "The Origin of the Work of Art" is a vague presentiment? Does this art achieve that repetition of the Greek in the modern of which Heidegger no doubt dreamed, as did Nietzsche before him, and as did, in their different ways, the authors of *Architectural Principles in the Age of Historicism*?

It is not difficult to come up with a negative answer. Does van Pelt not himself give us the key to discriminating the genuine from the counterfeit?

The Nazi transformation of Munich into the necropolis of Germany assimilated the ideology of the Athenian cemetery and the Holy Sepulcher into the Nazi movement. Unlike the earlier examples, however, the

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

German necropolis was only a sham. When Pericles reminded his fellow citizens of the city they had inherited from their fathers, and when the monks of Centula preached the resurrection of Christ, they had a reasonable or moral certainty that their pronouncements agreed with what their audience recognized as common sense. Their speeches did not contradict the way people in classical Athens or Carolingian Europe lived their daily lives. Considering the available evidence as fully and impartially as possible would lead a person from classical Athens to the ideals of the polis and a monk from Centula to the idea that Christ's death constituted a cosmic victory. Yet any German who watched the shamanic Munich rituals had to suspend reason. Only when submerged within the carefully manipulated atmosphere of collective hysteria did the proclamations make sense. However, this sense had no relationship with the proper common sense approach to the stela, which might restore a relationship to the past in our cities.⁷²

But even if this way of appealing to “the proper common sense” to draw a distinction between the genuine and the counterfeit might seem to help us resist the gloomy lesson van Pelt drew from Heidegger's entanglement with the Nazis, Heidegger's essay calls all such appeals to common sense into question. “The Origin of the World of Art” presupposes that for us what once may have been a firmly established common sense has begun to unravel. Such unraveling leads to demands for either a return to the good old common sense of the past or for a new beginning. Heidegger's essay bends these two demands together: it calls for a new beginning, but this is presented at the same time as a creative repetition of the Greek origin of our Western tradition. Van Pelt's appeal to common sense presupposes a repudiation of Heidegger's claim that art is a beginning, an origin, that with genuine art a thrust enters history. For what is truly original can, by definition, not be justified in terms of some already established common sense — a platitude in discussions of genius.

One conclusion one might want to draw is that originality, while it may be a virtue in art, is certainly not a virtue in politics, because by definition it has to challenge

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 332-333.

that common sense that is a presupposition of community. And if we should want to grant the importance of originality in art, we may have good reason to insist, with the aesthetic approach, on the separation of the spheres of art and politics, resist that embrace of politics and art that provides a key to National Socialism.

But van Pelt's appeal to common sense raises a different sort of question: is common sense not itself something historically established? The common sense of Periclean Athens was not that of Carolingian Centula: what separated them was the rise and triumph of Christianity, which shaped the world of the Middle Ages. But every establishment presupposes an establishing. How would van Pelt have us understand the establishing of Christianity? Imagine how a secular, educated Roman would have responded to those who claimed that Christ's death on the cross constituted a cosmic victory and longed themselves for martyrdom. Could they not have used arguments against these early Christians rather like that advocated by van Pelt against the Nazis and their so-called martyrs? Measured by the common sense of such a secular Roman, what these Christians were willing to die for must have seemed nonsense and he would have been incredulous to hear one of his fellows predict that some day this nonsense would come to be accepted as a new common sense.

Heidegger was speaking of world-establishing art, quite aware that, given the common sense of our modern age, the very idea of art as a beginning in his sense had to be dismissed as nonsense. Van Pelt has given us a reason to accept that verdict, based on what remains the ruling common sense, even if this common sense is fraying. But his discussion also raises the question: what is the function of art when there is no longer a robust common sense; when what was once a seemingly well established firmament of values is disintegrating, when appeals to ideals, and with it talk of heroes and sacrifice has come to have a hollow ring?

Van Pelt points to what distinguishes what is genuine from what is sham, when he suggests that the Nazi ideologues reoccupied places that they borrowed from both from the Greek and the Christian tradition, when they "assimilated the ideology of the Athenian cemetery and the Holy Sepulcher." Especially important here is the rhetoric of martyrdom, of blood-witnesses, of sacred blood, of self-sacrifice for the sake of the flag that would reward the martyr with eternal life. It is a rhetoric no one raised in a Christian

tradition would have had trouble understanding. Such rhetoric can be likened to a venerable vessel into which the Nazis now proposed to pour new wine, only they had no wine, they had in fact nothing substantial to pour into this vessel.

In Periclean Athens the necropolis, the Agora and the Acropolis anchored the reality of urban life in the consciousness of the people. In Germany architecture and urban design became tools of deception, a carefully designed stage for rituals handed down by the Ministry of Propaganda. In Athens the architecture disclosed a world where people could be free from the rage of the Furies; in Germany the architecture aided a cynical leadership to the calculatedly aroused outbursts of collective hysteria. And as all had become a theatre, and as everyone had been assigned roles as actors, no one felt guilty in 1945 when the proscenium crumbled, the backdrop burned and the performance came to its untimely end. Invoking the Heraclitean topos that all the world is a stage, and men merely players, the good citizens took off their masks.⁷³

7

Van Pelt's account brings to mind the story of the golden calf, a story of Moses delaying to come down from the mountain to mediate between God and the people of Israel, and the people who, unwilling to accept the delay, demand of Aaron that he provide them with a simulacrum of the absent divinity:

“Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” And Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf; and they said: These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt!” When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

made proclamation and said: "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord."
 (*Exodus* 32, 1-5, RSV)

Something finite is put in the place of sacred transcendence. Here we have the replacement operation that is a defining characteristic of what has come to be called kitsch. With this understanding of kitsch I am following the interpretation given by the Austrian novelist and thinker Hermann Broch, who, found a refuge from the Nazis in the United States. In a lecture he gave to Yale students in 1950⁷⁴ Broch spoke of the kitsch personality, which, faced with what is all too often ugly and disgusting, demands a more beautiful world. As I have suggested in the preceding lectures, ever since the nineteenth century there has been a growing sense that industry and technology coupled with a rapidly increasing population have been robbing the world of its former beauty. But is there not still enough of that beauty around, in the art and architecture of the past, for example, or in landscapes that have not yet quite caught up with modernity, such as the world figured by Heidegger's peasant woman, to allow us to make up for what the modern world lacked by drawing on this more beautiful past

Broch located the origin of kitsch in the Enlightenment and its exaltation of reason and individual freedom. Within him- or herself the individual discovered an infinity. Could such individuals then not, relying on their own reason and creativity, meet the challenge of a nature increasingly bereft of meaning, transforming it in the image of an ideal they themselves had created?

This brought the act of revelation into every single human mind and thereby saddled it with the responsibility of faith, a responsibility that the Church had previously borne. The mind settled the account and became presumptuous and boastful.

It became presumptuous because it had been assigned this cosmic and divine task, and it became boastful because it was well aware that it had been given too much credit, that it had been loaded with a responsibility that exceeded its resources. This is the origin of

⁷⁴ Hermann Broch, "Einige Bemerkungen zum Problem des Kitsches," *Essays*, vol. 1, *Dichten und Erkennen* (Zurich: Rhein, 1955), pp. 295-309. English translation, "Notes on the Problem of Kitsch, in Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch. The World of Bad Taste* (New York: Universe Books, 1969), pp. 49-67.

Romanticism; here is the origin of, on the one hand, the exaltation of the man who is full of artistic (and spiritual) energy and who tries to elevate the wretched daily round of life on earth to an absolute or pseudo-absolute sphere, and, on the other, the terror of the man who senses the risk involved.⁷⁵

Romanticism is tossed back and forth between godlike exaltation and fear and trembling, between a sense that reason had opened up a path to the absolute and a nihilism that had left human beings adrift in a meaningless world. Once it was established religion, the inherited faith, that had allowed the individual to experience the world as a meaningful whole, as a cosmos. But the faith that once supported such certainty could not survive the Enlightenment's liberation of humanity. The other side of such liberation is the experience of what Kundera was to call the unbearable lightness of being. A new faith was demanded to answer the old.

But where was such faith to be found? Could reason furnish what was required? In this connection Broch speaks of

The religion of reason that the French revolution tried to establish when, having dethroned God, it saw the need of basing its virtue on something absolute, and accordingly had to invent its "Goddess of Reason." But as things proceed rationally in the kingdom of reason, this "Goddess of Reason" was soon forgotten.⁷⁶

Reason soon turned against itself and demonstrated its inability to furnish the kind of certainty demanded. But could not beauty take reason's place and found a new religion?

This divine beauty is the fundamental symbol of all the symbolist schools and is at the root of their aspiration to set up a new religion of beauty (which one can detect both in the Pre-Raphaelites and in Mallarmé or George). Without damaging the greatness of Mallarmé or the important artistic work of George, or even the admittedly considerably lesser value

⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

of the Pre-Raphaelites, we can safely say that the goddess of beauty in art is the goddess Kitsch.⁷⁷

Let me return to Broch's claim that "the goddess of beauty is the goddess Kitsch." Broch himself calls that claim into question:

One can raise the objection that every artistic act generates beauty. This is true, just as it is true that every cognitive act generates truth. But has there ever been a human eye capable of contemplating "the beauty" or "the truth"? ... A scientist who puts no more than his own love of truth into his research will not get very far; he needs rather an absolute dedication to the object of his research, he needs logic and intuition; and if luck (which plays a rather more important part than the idea of truth in such cases) is in his favor, truth will appear all by itself when his work or experiments come to an end. The same is true of the artist. He, too, has to subject himself unconditionally to the object; his capacity to listen to the secret voice of the object (independently of the fact that it presents itself as an interior or exterior object), to seek out the laws that it obeys — think of Dürer's experiments with perspective, or Rembrandt's experiments with light — does not depend on the artist's love of beauty.⁷⁸

We may well feel that science and art have been brought here into too close a relationship. Broch considers both explorations of reality. "Art is made up of intuitions about reality, and is superior to Kitsch solely thanks to these intuitions."⁷⁹ But "reality" would not seem to mean quite the same thing in the two cases. The reality of the modern scientist is, as we have seen, an already objectified reality. Such objectification is the condition of his infinite pursuit, a pursuit that remains open because the scientist knows that the reality he seeks to understand transcends whatever truths he has been able to wrest from it. The scientist is not tempted to make truth as such his goal.

The reality that calls the artist to create new expressions calls him beyond that objectified reality explored by science. Broch could have agreed with Heidegger's

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

⁷⁸ Broch, p. 61.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

statement: "Beauty is one way in which truth occurs as unconcealedness."⁸⁰ Also with his claim that such occurrence requires an openness to what transcends all our attempts at mastery, an openness to what Heidegger called the earth. Kitsch does not know such openness. What blocks it is precisely the insistence that the artist make beauty the end of his striving. Kitsch, as Broch understands it, is not interested in exploring an ever elusive reality. It is content with the established and accepted with which it plays and which it transfigures. Within the value system of art an other is thus constituted, identical with it, except that second system has closed itself off from that infinite reality that provided the former with its necessary elusive ground. Instead of unending attempts to express what finally resists all expression, we meet thus in kitsch with a reappropriation of the results of past struggles. Does the art of the past not show us what beauty is? Emphasis shifts from the producing to the product, from the future to the past, from the infinite to the finite. What has come to be established and accepted now assumes an authority that lends itself to the formulation of rules and recipes. "Reducing the infinity of God to the finitude of the visible, the faith of the mere moralist is dragged down from the sphere of the ethical into that of the aesthetic, the infinite demand of faith is debased into an aesthetic demand."⁸¹

"Aesthetic demand" here means a demand to produce a certain appearance, the sort of effect that that precisely because it answers to quite definite, established expectations, invites the formulation of definite rules and their pedantic observance. "Aesthetic demand" and rationalism thus belong together. The rationalist will want to specify what must be done in order to bring about a certain effect, and it does not matter here whether the goal is erotic titillation, a religious state of mind, or patriotic fervor, to be met by porno-Kitsch, religious Kitsch, or patriotic Kitsch respectively. Reality understood as a product of past interpretation comes to cover up reality as the ground of

⁸⁰ "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p. 56.

⁸¹ Broch, "Das Böse im Wertsystem der Kunst," *Essays*, vol. 1, *Dichten und Erkennen* (Zurich: Rhein, 1955), p. 341.

all interpretation. Kitsch so understood has its moral equivalent in pedantry: only a pedant believes that being moral reduces to following a set of rules.⁸²

8

Both science and art threaten to re-place reality with a second, man-made reality. Both invite us to understand the creator of this second reality as a second God.

Science seeks to understand reality in order to master it. This, however, is an infinite task: never will our desire for mastery be satisfied. Because of this the progress of science and of technology knows no limits. By their very nature, both always remain related to a reality still to be mastered, a reality to which they have to remain open if there is to be further progress. Their covering up of reality is therefore never complete.

Aestheticizing art is more successful in covering up reality, even, perhaps especially when it draws its themes from reality. For reality is now only material for the artist that, transformed by art, loses its independence. What matters is no longer reality, which, for a time at least, can be left behind, forgotten, but the quality of what the artist has created.

Far more dangerous is the attempt to aestheticize reality itself, to transform life and the world in which we live into a work of art, especially dangerous when that attempt uses technology as a means to achieve its ends. Should that attempt succeed it would indeed have to destroy in the end our scientific culture in its very origin. For, seeking to master reality, science remains in its very essence bound to reality. The aestheticizing of reality breaks that bond, substitutes for reality its aestheticized simulacrum, even as it covers up that substitution. Thus it means reality's derealization, means a loss of reality.

As old as humanity is the terror time,⁸³ which weighs on us in the knowledge that we must die, that all we can hope to be and achieve some day will be past and forgotten. And as old as humanity are attempts to banish such terror with aesthetic, religious, and scientific constructions. Again and again this terror has led human beings to distort

⁸² On pedantry, see Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (New York: Dover, 1968), vol. 1, p. 60.

⁸³ See Karsten Harries, "Building and the Terror of Time," *Perspecta*, vol. 19, 1982, pp. 59-69. (4)

reality, including their own reality, for reality and time cannot be divorced. The terror of time means also a fear of reality, for never will reality satisfy our demands for security. In this sense one could speak of the essential lack of reality. But every attempt to overcome that lack threatens to make us deaf to its claims, threatens to deny us access to that reality in which all meaning finally has its ground, a reality that by its very essence will never be fully comprehended and mastered. To open windows to that ever transcendent reality we must find the strength to abandon the hope to take charge of reality, the strength to not only accept, but to affirm our mortality. Only such strength will allow us to hear the claims persons and things place on us, will let us understand that we cannot construct, invent, or imagine what will give our lives meaning, measure, and direction, but have to receive and discover it. To find meaning in reality we have to be able to respond to the countless ways in which it claims and calls us, in pity and in anger, in love and in hate, in joy and in despair. There was and there still is art born of such response-ability. And there was and is thinking born of the same ability to respond. The main task both the arts and the humanities face today is not to decorate, but to open windows in the house objectifying reason has built: windows to transcendence. I shall return to this task in my last lecture.

4. Why Art Matters

1

I began my first lecture by raising the question: what does art matter in our modern world? I suggested that what is at issue is finally nothing less than our humanity: we need art to save ourselves in a world that threatens to reduce human beings to no more than material to be used and abused by those who happen to be in power. In this fourth and final lecture I would like to advance some considerations that develop and begin to substantiate that suggestion.

I would like to begin by turning to a today often repeated claim, made by Walter Benjamin: in this age of their mechanical reproduction, Benjamin claims, works of art have to lose the aura they once possessed.⁸⁴ That recalls Hegel's claim that today art in its highest sense belongs to a never to be recovered past. And like Hegel, who proclaims the death of art in its highest sense even as he invites us to affirm that death as a necessary consequence of humanity's coming of age, Benjamin, too, proclaims the loss of the aura works of art once possessed, even as he invites us to affirm that loss as a necessary byproduct of the progress of technology, progress that he recognizes to be essential to the progress of humanity: does technology, promising to render us the masters and possessors, not just of nature without, but of our own nature, not also promise true autonomy and happiness to all? This, to be sure, presupposes, as Benjamin reminds us, that a society is "mature enough to incorporate technology as its organ,"⁸⁵ instead of allowing technology to become an instrument used by those in power to reduce human beings to human material. Such maturity cannot simply be assumed. When Benjamin wrote these words in 1935, the very year Heidegger was also questioning this assumption in his lecture "The Origin of the Work of Art," Fascism seemed about to triumph in Europe, not only embracing technology, but exploiting art and its aura to transfigure technology into a modern idol. Thus while, according to Benjamin the "present conditions of production" were brushing aside "a number of outmoded concepts,

⁸⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), pp. 217-251.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery,”⁸⁶ the continued potency of these very concepts was demonstrated by the way they were used by Fascism, it too eager to use technology as its organ, to brush away what it took to be the outmoded concept that human beings as such had dignity and demanded respect, to reduce them to mere material, to be organized or discarded by the artist-leader of genius, as he saw fit.

No doubt it was horror at the Fascist appropriation of the Nietzschean dictum that only as an aesthetic phenomenon can human existence be justified⁸⁷ that colored Benjamin’s rhetoric in that essay. But was the continued potency of the aura that attaches to aesthetic phenomena not demonstrated by the triumph of the Nazis’ aestheticization of politics over their Marxist rivals’ politicization of aesthetics in the Germany of the Thirties, and not just there, but in Fascist Italy and elsewhere? Heidegger’s essay “On the Origin of the Work of Art” can be read as perhaps the most thoughtful and for that very reason to someone, sharing Benjamin’s convictions, particularly hateful expression of such a Nietzschean aestheticizing of politics. The conclusion of Benjamin’s essay invites us to read it as a response. To be sure, Benjamin does not mention Heidegger; his target here is the Italian futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti as a representative of Fascism: “‘*Fiat ars — pereat mundus,*’ says Fascism, and, as Marinetti admits, expects war to supply the artistic gratification of a sense perception that has been changed by technology. This is evidently the consummation of ‘*l’art pour l’art.*’ Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic. Communism responds by politicizing art.”⁸⁸ Politicizing art — where Benjamin was no doubt thinking of his fellow exile and close friend, the poet Berthold Brecht — here means placing art at the service of the true interests of human beings, not at the service of those who sought to exploit for their own ends that ill will against time, and therefore also against reality, that

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 218.

⁸⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragodie*, 5, *Werke*. 3 vols. ed. Karl Schlechta (Munich: Hanser, 1966), vol. 1, p. 40.

⁸⁸ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” p. 242.

we have seen in the previous lectures to be a presupposition of the aesthetic approach to art.

Heidegger, to be sure, should not be confused with Marinetti. Was one target of Heidegger's essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" not also that aesthetic approach to art that has to culminate in *'l'art pour l'art'*? On this point the essay's "Epilogue" is quite explicit.⁸⁹ Heidegger could have pointed out that, when a work of art comes to be understood as first of all an aesthetic object created for the sake of art or of beauty, it has lost its original world-establishing function, which Heidegger links to ritual and religion. In their critique of the aesthetic approach to art Benjamin and Heidegger agree. But that critique lets them look in very different directions: following Hegel and Marx, and at the time very much influenced by his friend Brecht, Benjamin looks forward to a future in which human beings would no longer need art, either to compensate them for what reality denies them or to first give voice to their deepest interests. The politicization of art envisioned by him presupposes that these interests are already known so that art could be put in their service. Heidegger, on the other hand, disagreeing with both Hegel and Marx, disagreeing with the Enlightenment, looks backward, back to that origin of art that, Hegel had insisted, the progress of reason has to leave behind, countering that this origin continues to present us with a challenge. At issue here is the question whether reason and enlightened self-interest are sufficient to bind freedom and lead us to a life worth living, whether we can dispense with what in the preceding lecture I called the ethical function of art.

It is precisely this ethical dimension that gives the work of art its special aura. To be sure, in "The Origin of the Work of Art" the word aura does not occur. Still that essay invites consideration of the continuing significance of aura, which promises a key to the essence of what is here called "great art." But, as I pointed out in the last lecture, such consideration will have to confront the not only temporal, but spiritual proximity of Heidegger's essay with its talk of the world-establishing power of art and the aesthetic

⁸⁹ Martin Heidegger, "Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks, in *Holzweg, Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5. (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), p. 67. "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. and intro. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

enactment of Nazi ideology. Benjamin's warning against the Fascist aestheticization or politics applies very much to Heidegger's understanding of the polis, in the image of the work of art, as the work of the creative statesman.⁹⁰ But such proximity is not sufficient reason to dismiss the essay, especially what it has say about the work of art as a presentation of the earth. As I shall try to show, what Heidegger here has to say casts light on what is at issue in that loss of aura proclaimed by Benjamin: our continued need for art.

2

As his work in its entirety shows, Benjamin, too, found it difficult to let go of what in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" he seems so ready to relegate to a never to be recovered past. In that essay this is hinted at by an example he offers, where it is significant that it is taken not from art, but from nature: "If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of those mountains, of that branch."⁹¹ The experience is familiar: the musical outline of a distant mountain range, observed on some warm, lazy summer afternoon, hints at some elusive magical other that will not yield its magic to the camera: that may well give me an image that will preserve a trace of this magical moment, but it will not allow me to hear in the same way the beckoning call of those distant mountains, as if up there I would find home. The material object seen is experienced here as a figure of utopia. That figural significance gives the perceived its special resonance and depth.

Is it this figural significance of the perceived that the word "aura" is here meant to capture? The Greek "aura" meant "breath" or "breeze," the Latin "aura" a gentle wind or current of air; "aura" thus came to name the subtle emanation of some substance, for example the special odor of a rose. In this sense an artificial rose can be said to lack the aura of the original. In all these cases "aura" names a perhaps elusive, but definitely

⁹⁰ See especially Alexander Schwan, *Politische Philosophie im Denken Heideggers*, 2nd revised ed., (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989 and Karsten Harries, "Heidegger as a Political Thinker," *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1976, pp. 644-669.

⁹¹ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," pp. 222-223.

physical phenomenon that can in principle be measured. Aura here has a material basis. That basis became more elusive, was spiritualized, when aura came to be understood in the 19th century as a "subtle emanation around living beings." In that sense one might speak of the special aura issuing from a charismatic person or from someone we love. And is there not a similarity between the aura of the beloved and the aura of that distant mountain range? Does it not hint at a happiness that cannot be captured in words?

What Benjamin here has in mind would not appear to be a material phenomenon: this at least is suggested by his definition of aura "as the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be."⁹² The chosen examples shift our attention away from smell and touch, senses that are more immediately involved with matter, to the more spiritual eye. Sight, to be sure, presupposes distance: whatever is seen is seen at a distance and in principle that distance can be measured. Benjamin's invocation of a "unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be," forces us to link the phenomenon of aura as he here understands it, not to a physical, but to a psychical distance, where this psychical distance also has a temporal dimension as Benjamin points out in his elaboration of this thought in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939): "To perceive the aura of an object we look at is to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. [An important footnote adds this explanation: 'This endowment is a wellspring of poetry. Wherever a human being, an animal, or an inanimate object thus endowed by the poet lifts up its eyes, it draws him into the distance. The gaze of nature thus awakened dreams and pulls the poet after its dreams.'] This experience corresponds to the data of the *mémoire involontaire*, (These data, incidentally, are unique: they are lost to the memory that seeks to retain them. Thus they lend support to a concept of the aura that comprises 'the unique manifestation of a distance.')⁹³ Looking at the distant mountain range we are drawn to something nameless and far removed from the cares and concerns that bind us to the here and now, lost in the immemorial past.

Psychical distance and its bracketing of the everyday and its temporality have been discussed ever since Kant as a defining characteristic of the aesthetic experience. That phenomenon was given authoritative expression by Edward Bullough in his

⁹² Ibid., p. 222.

⁹³ Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *Illuminations*, pp. 188 and 200.

“'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle.” Bullough gives the example of the way we experience the world in a fog at sea, where everything seen seems strangely distant, even when close, everything heard strangely close, even when distant. The fog lets us become oblivious of our everyday cares and see things “'objectively,' as it has often been called, by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasize the 'objective' features of the experience, and by interpreting even our 'subjective' affections not as modes of our being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon.” The thing is strangely transfigured, “seemingly possessed by human affections.” So transfigured the phenomenon acquires a flavor of “concentrated poignancy and delight,” as if illuminated by “the passing ray of a brighter light.”⁹⁴ The quasi-religious significance of aesthetic experience so understood is underscored by Jacques Maritain, when he says of beauty, following the medievals, that it possesses “the flavor of the terrestrial paradise, because it restores, for a moment, the peace and simultaneous delight of the intellect and the senses.”⁹⁵ Ever since Plato the beautiful has figured a spiritual home.

The promise of such a utopian home also seems inseparable from Benjamin’s experience of the aura possessed by his distant mountain range: it, too, seems to possess a spiritual significance. That something of the sort is indeed constitutive of aesthetic experience is hinted at by Bullough when he suggests that when transfigured into an aesthetic object a thing found in nature acquires a quasi-human presence: the aesthetic experience of natural objects involves a humanizing identification with them: spirit without now seems to answer spirit within. And is such a process of identification not also, as Hegel suggested, at work in all artistic creation? Benjamin, too, understands aura in terms of such an identification, which lets the natural appear as more than just natural.

But is this not only an appearance, an illusion, something read into nature by the human observer? As Benjamin’s friend Theodor Adorno was to put it, “Aesthetic appearance means always: nature as the appearance of the supernatural.” But as he also reminds us: “art is not transcendence, but an artifact, something human, and ultimately:

⁹⁴ Edward Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle," *British Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 5 (1912), pp. 87-117, #4.

⁹⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism and the Frontiers of Poetry*, tr. Joseph W. Evans (New York: Scribner's, 1962), p. 24.

nature.”⁹⁶ So understood, the phenomenon of aura veils the perceived with an illusion of transcendence. But does not reality demand eyes open to all that threatens to destroy dreams of happiness, open to hunger and disease, to injustice and exploitation. And was that not true especially in 1935, at a time when such long familiar scourges were being raised to an up to then unknown, higher level by the terror being rained on millions by leaders hungry for power and deaf to outmoded appeals to human dignity, very much attuned to the new means of domination and destruction made available by the progress of technology.

If, as his loving description of the distant mountain range and many similar passages show, Benjamin knew all too well the seductive call of the aura that seems to issue from works of art, from nature, and from persons, he also had good reason to be suspicious of the spiritual, quasi-religious significance “aura” so readily suggests. Had not Marx called religion “the opium of the people”: “at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering, ... the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions.”⁹⁷ And since human suffering and oppression remain, even as that death of God proclaimed by Nietzsche would seem to deny those truly of this modern age the consolation religion once was able to provide, cannot the artwork and its aura offer at least some compensation for what had been lost by offering a substitute, if only illusory transcendence? But, especially in 1935, the state of the world made an escape into the aesthetic seem irresponsible to Benjamin. What was needed, he insisted, was not the consolation offered by beautiful illusion that willingly turns its back on ugly reality, but active intervention that will change the world for the better. Precisely because he was unwilling to accept the distance that on the aesthetic approach must separate beautiful illusion from reality, Benjamin, in this respect quite representative of his generation, had to resist the aesthetic approach to art, which the phenomenon of aura so readily invited.

⁹⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedmann, tr. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 78. Cited in Rajeev S. Patke, “Benjamin's Aura, Stevens's Description without Place,” *Benjamin's Blindspot: Walter Benjamin & the Premature Death of Aura.*, ed. Lise Patt. Topanga, California: Institute of Cultural Inquiry, 2001, 81-98.

⁹⁷ Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, February, 1844.

3

I have suggested that Benjamin's "aura" invites interpretation as just another variant of the experience of the aesthetic object discussed in earlier lectures: has the aesthetic experience not been described in terms of a distance that preserves the integrity and autonomy of the aesthetic object, a distance that lets the observer become fascinated and absorbed by the aesthetic object's unique presencing. Notwithstanding the death of God, such absorption in the beautiful promised a secular redemption.⁹⁸ The celebration of aura would thus seem to belong with the cult of beauty that I discussed in the second lecture and that is so much part of the aesthetic approach to art. Benjamin is a modernist in his resistance to that cult: "To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception (the perceiver being the advanced or conscious proletarian) whose 'sense of the universal equality of things' (that is, its Marxist communal egalitarian sense) has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction"⁹⁹

The last quote expands on and at the same time demands reconsideration of aura as an aesthetic phenomenon. Key here is Benjamin's emphasis on the unique materiality of the auratic object, which is said to be challenged by the proletarian's "Marxist communal egalitarian sense." Benjamin here links aura to originality, where "the presence of the original" is said to be "the prerequisite of the concept of authenticity. "Chemical analyses of the patina of a bronze can help to establish this, as does the proof that a given manuscript of the Middle Ages stems from an archive of the fifteenth century. The whole sphere of authenticity is outside technical — and, of course, not only technical reproducibility."¹⁰⁰

The way Benjamin links aura to a particular piece of matter invites further consideration. So understood, aura is destroyed by reproduction, where thinking of such essentially reproducible art-works as woodcuts and engravings — to which Benjamin himself calls the reader's attention in his essay — we may well wonder whether so

⁹⁸ Cf. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), p. 147: "Presentness is grace."

⁹⁹ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 223.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p., 220.

understood the concern for authenticity does not lose sight of art character of art and distances Benjamin's understanding of aura from aura as understood by the aesthetic approach. For a defining characteristic of the aesthetic approach to art, captured by the rhetoric of "beautiful illusion" (*schöner Schein*), would seem to be precisely the dissociation of the aura of the aesthetic object from its materiality, from what Heidegger calls its thingliness.

But must we not grant at least this much: whatever else works of art may be, they are also things. As the painter Frank Stella put it: "Any painting is an object and anyone who gets involved enough in this finally has to face up to the objectness of whatever he's doing. He is making a thing."¹⁰¹ But is it really so obvious that the artwork must be a thing? In the case of a painting by Stella it seems natural to identify the thing, the material object, with the work of art. But when I see the same painting in a reproduction, am I not also encountering the unique work of art, perceive its special aura, if in a more or less deficient mode, depending on the quality of the reproduction? Just how important is the unique materiality or what Heidegger calls the thingly quality of the work of art? Have artists like Duchamp and Warhol not taught us what should have been evident all along: that this thingly quality is not essential to the work of art? And is this not what Benjamin himself insists on when he opposes to what he takes to be the backward looking auratic understanding of art to the forward looking political understanding that he associates with Marxism, where he too recognized the importance of Dada in destroying the matter-bound aura of the art work. Marcel Duchamp thus declared that he "wanted to get away from the physical aspect of painting," that he "was interested in making painting serve [his] purposes, and in getting away from the physicality of painting. For me Courbet had introduced the physical emphasis in the nineteenth century. I was interested in ideas, not merely in visual products."¹⁰² The politicization of art advocated

¹⁰¹ "Questions to Stella and Judd," Interview with Bruce Glaser, edited by Lucy R. Lippard, *Minimal Art. A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: Dutton, 1968), pp. 157 - 158.

¹⁰² Marcel Duchamp, "Painting ... at the Service of the Mind," in *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. Herschel B. Chipp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 393-394.

by Benjamin is not so very different, although he had no doubt very different ideas, very different purposes in mind than the self-absorbed Duchamp.

Much recent concept art could be cited in support of what Benjamin has to say about the shift from an auratic to a political art. To be sure, there will always be some material thing that mediates the aesthetic experience, but that experience will leave the mediating thing behind and render it quite unimportant, no more than an occasion to engage the thoughtful observer. And what case can be made for the importance of some unique piece of matter? Kant already had called the importance of the thingly character of the work of art into question: for him the aesthetic object is in an important sense not a thing at all. And is he not supported in an obvious way by such arts as music or poetry? When we speak of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, are we speaking of a thing? If so, how is "thing" understood here? Can it be weighed or located in time and space? That can be said of some particular score and every performance takes place in space and time — but we would not want to identify either with the Fifth Symphony, which will continue to be when these are long gone.

To be sure, paintings are things, and for those of us who lack a sufficiently strong imagination, aesthetic experience depends on objects that present themselves to our senses. But does a pure aesthetic experience not surpass the material object and leave it behind, absorbed in the beauty of its optical appearance? The material thing, it would seem, is here like a gate that grants access to the beautiful forms that are the object of a purely aesthetic and that means for Kant a spiritual understanding. A distinction between material thing and aesthetic object is demanded by Kant's understanding of the disinterested character of aesthetic experience. Given such an aesthetic understanding of art, the technical reproducibility of works of art should pose no threat to their art character or aesthetic aura. It only threatens those who would fetishize the thing in the work of art.

Heidegger could be cited as an example. He, too, takes for granted that the work of art is more than just a mere thing. It does indeed seem obvious that an artwork is a thing that has been made: made to be appreciated as an aesthetic object. Artwork = (material) thing + (spiritual) aesthetic component. And isn't it the addition of this aesthetic component that makes something a work of art? Heidegger, however, claims,

that such an understanding obscures the nature of great art, which stands in a different and more intimate relationship to things. Benjamin might say, Heidegger refuses to let go of a more archaic auratic understanding of the artwork that remains focused on its thingly character. And Heidegger would have to grant this, aware that his emphasis on the unique materiality of the work of art cannot be reconciled with the modern understanding of the artwork as an aesthetic object, an understanding that subordinates the artwork's materiality to the beautiful illusion it creates. In painting this expresses itself as a subordination of materiality to opticality. With this our understanding of the aura of the artwork also has to shift. What now matters is no longer the material object, but the essentially reproducible content that finds expression in the particular thing. With this the aura of the artwork comes to be tied to the originality of the creative genius rather than to the originality of the material thing. Heidegger's emphasis on the thingly character of the work of art claims that something essential is lost in this aesthetic transformation of the aura that once belonged to works of art. And Benjamin would seem to agree, even if such agreement does not mean that he thinks it either possible or desirable to return to art its lost aura.

4

Benjamin recognizes that his matter-based concept of aura casts light not so much on the aesthetic approach to art as on an older understanding that placed art at the service of ritual: "We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual — first the magical, then the religious kind."¹⁰³ And that older understanding, even if not in keeping with the spirit of the times, yet retains its hold on us. Benjamin thus finds it "significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function."¹⁰⁴

Heidegger would have agreed, although more optimistic — or, should we say, more nostalgic? — than Benjamin, he seeks to preserve that archaic origin: he looks to it to distinguish what great art once was and perhaps still can be from the aesthetic art that

¹⁰³ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 223.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 223-224.

is demanded by this age of the world picture. That distinction is said to show itself in the very different ways in which works of art are “set up”:

When a work is brought into a collection or placed in an exhibition we also say that it is ”set up.” But this setting up differs essentially from setting up in the sense of erecting a building, raising a statue, presenting a tragedy at a holy festival. Such setting up is erecting in the sense of dedication and praise. Here “setting up” no longer means a bare placing. To dedicate means to consecrate, in the sense that in setting up the work the holy is opened up as holy and the god is invoked into the openness of his presence. Praise belongs to the dedication as honor to the dignity and splendor of the god.¹⁰⁵

But the modern world picture, as I discussed in the second lecture, has no room for either gods or the holy: the world of temple and statue has perished. Although both may still have a place in our modern world as valued aesthetic objects, as such they have lost their basis in religious ritual. To be sure, we can grant Benjamin that “This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.”¹⁰⁶ This poses the question how to understand this modern cult of beauty: as a secularized pursuit of grace, where the artist assumes the role of the priest? Or as a nostalgic attempt to hold on to something that in fact has disappeared from our modern world — in other words, as an example of bad faith? More resolutely modern than any celebration of the artwork’s special aura would seem to be Kant’s understanding of beauty as object of an entirely disinterested satisfaction. It entails the reproducibility of what from an aesthetic point of view is essential in the work of art: its beautiful form. As Benjamin observes in a footnote: “To the extent to which the cult value of the painting is secularized the ideas of its fundamental uniqueness lose distinctness. In the imagination of the beholder the uniqueness of the phenomena that hold sway in the cult image is more and more displaced by the empirical uniqueness of the creator or of the creative achievement.”¹⁰⁷ Such uniqueness transcends the material work of art,

¹⁰⁵ Heidegger. “The Origin of the Work of Art,” pp. 43-44.

¹⁰⁶ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” p. 224.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p, 244,

transcends the thing on which Heidegger placed so much weight. What matters about art, on this view, belongs to spirit rather than matter.

Just this, however, is challenged by Heidegger, when he takes one task of art to be the presentation of the earth. At issue is his conviction that an acceptance and preservation of the incommensurability of our understanding and reality is a condition of finding meaning in life, that meaning cannot finally be invented by us, but must be discovered. All meaning is a gift. In this sense I too want to claim, responding to clues I find not just in Heidegger but also in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, that an auratic appreciation of reality is needed to ground ethics and politics and that we need art to represent and thus recall for us the aura of nature, especially our own nature. This presupposes a rejection of the premises that support Benjamin's call for a politicization of art.

But I have been moving too fast. Let me slow down and return to the claim that our understanding and nature are incommensurable. I discussed that incommensurability at some length in my second lecture. Here I would like to suggest that it is sufficient to contemplate any natural object, say a rock or a tree, to know about the inadequacy of all our attempts to really get hold of its reality, sufficient to let us recognize that reality will finally always transcend and elude our grasp. As Heidegger put it,

A stone presses downward and manifests its heaviness. But while this heaviness exerts an opposing pressure upon us it denies us any penetration into it. If we attempt such a penetration by breaking open the rock, it still does not display in its fragments anything inward that has been disclosed. The stone has instantly withdrawn again into the same dull pressure and bulk of its fragments. If we try to lay hold of the stone's heaviness in another way, by placing the stone on a balance, we merely bring the heaviness into the form of a calculated weight. This perhaps very precise determination of the stone remains a number, but the weight's burden has escaped us. Color shines and wants only to shine. When we analyze it in rational terms by measuring its wavelength, it is gone. Earth thus shatters

every attempt to penetrate into it. It causes every merely calculating importunity upon it to turn into a destruction.¹⁰⁸

We can of course lift the stone, feel its weight. Feeling its weight we may say, it's heavy. To give a more exact answer we may state its weight in kilograms. But such statements, no matter how detailed and accurate, lose the weight that I experience with my whole straining body, that lets me experience also myself as an essentially embodied self. Challenging any understanding of reality that makes our ability to describe it clearly and distinctly its measure, I want to maintain that we experience that something is real only as long as we remain aware that we are unable to fully understand whatever is before us. Reality transcends our understanding and language. Inseparable from our awareness of the reality of things is an awareness of what I want to call "material transcendence." With that expression I point in the same general direction as Heidegger with his "earth" or Kant with his "thing-in-itself," which is present to us only as appearance. What invites such talk is the fact that, even if inevitably mediated by our language or concepts and as such appearance, what thus appears is experienced as not created by our understanding, but as given. Inseparable from our experience of things is a sense of this gift, an awareness that our understanding is bound to our bodies and finite, and that means also that the reach of our concepts and words is limited. Everything real is infinitely complex and can never be fully translated into words. The rift between thing and word cannot be closed and it is this rift that gives everything we experience as real its distinctive aura.

5

Benjamin would have objected to what he might have called a fetishizing of matter incompatible with the positivist spirit of modern materialism. And thus he links the aura of the authentic work of art not so much to the unique, material thing it is, as to the way it is "imbedded in the fabric of tradition."¹⁰⁹ History and memory are given greater importance than nature. Reproduction is said to tear the artwork out of its historical context and thus to destroy its aura. This claim invites a broader application: in the age of mechanical reproduction, must not nature, too, and finally even human nature

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," pp. 46-47.

¹⁰⁹ Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 223.

lose that special aura that distinguishes the original from its simulacrum? And if so, what are the implications of the loss of aura for ethics? This is perhaps the central question raised in this final lecture.

Benjamin's loving description of the true collector — he knew what he was talking about, having been just such a collector himself — offers a pointer to just how much is at stake in the refusal to let go of the artwork's aura: human happiness.

O bliss of the collector, bliss of the man of leisure! Of no one has less been expected, and no one has a greater sense of well-being than the man who has been able to carry on his disreputable existence in the mask of Spitzweg's "Bookworm." For inside him there are spirits, or at least little genii, which have seen to it that for the collector — and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be — ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.¹¹⁰

We may well ask: but what does it matter that I own this particular material object, this surviving exemplar of some rare edition, rather than some readily available and perhaps much more informative critical edition of the same text? Why should I care about the book's provenance, its previous owners?

Benjamin's portrait of the collector underscores the way aura grants to things an almost human presence.

Habent sua fata libelli: these words may have been intended as a general statement about books. So books like *The Divine Comedy*, Spinoza's *Ethics*, and *The Origin of the Species* have their fates. A collector, however, interprets this Latin saying differently. For him, not only books but also copies of books have their fates. And in this sense, the most important fate of a copy is its encounter with him, with his own collection.

¹¹⁰ Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library: A Talk About Book Collecting," *Illuminations*, p. 67.

I am not exaggerating when I say that to a true collector the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth.¹¹¹

The acquisition of a book is here described in a way that suggests a marriage. It is like, not just meeting, but choosing to live with another person, to make that person part of our lives, to live in them. The simile suggests that the aura some book or work of art possesses for the true collector is not unlike the aura that any person possesses whom we encounter and cherish as such. The true collector invests what he collects with his own humanity, experiences it as if it were a persons. That helps to explain its aura and his bliss.

It is indeed the person in the work of art, Benjamin suggests, that provides a last refuge to what remains of the cult value once possessed by works of art:

In photography, exhibition value begins to displace cult value all along the line. But cult value does not give way without resistance. It retires into an ultimate retrenchment: the human countenance. It is no accident that the portrait was the focal point of early photography. The cult of remembrance of loved ones, absent or dead, offers a last refuge for the cult value of the picture. For the last time the aura emanates from the early photographs in the fleeting expression of a human face. This is what constitutes their melancholy, incomparable beauty.¹¹²

And is there not a sense in which it is the human countenance of a painting, say by Jackson Pollock, which, while offering us no more than traces, nevertheless is experienced as a kind of self-portrait that here, too, offers what once was the cult value of painting a last refuge? We get here a hint that the cult value of certain objects is tied to the way they place us in an ongoing human context. The loss of aura means spiritual homelessness. The age of mechanical reproduction threatens the triumph of nihilism.

As his discussion of the collector suggests, the paradigm behind all experiences of aura is for Benjamin the experience of another person: "Looking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze. Where this expectation is met (which, in the case of thought processes can apply equally to the look

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 61.

¹¹² Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 226.

of the mind and to a glance (pure and simple), there is an experience of the aura to the fullest extent.”¹¹³ There is to be sure a profound difference between experiencing the gaze of the other and experiencing the aura of a writer or a composer in one of his or her creations. When I experience the other person, the experience of his or her distinctive aura is the experience of an incarnation of spirit and matter so complete that there is no distance between the two. The mystery of aura is the mystery of such incarnation, which is fully realized when two lovers look into each other’s eyes: “The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in return.”¹¹⁴ But something of the sort is present in every experience of aura: to experience the aura of something is to experience it as if it were another person, capable of speech. Benjamin no doubt would have us underscore the “as if”: “Experience of the aura thus rests on the transportation of a response common in human relationships to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man.”¹¹⁵ On this interpretation it is the human subject who invests an essentially mute nature with something like spirit of soul. But must we who are truly of this modern world not recognize that such an investment is at bottom a self-deception? Today a child may still experience rocks and animals as animate, endowed with the power of speech; and fairy tales preserve traces of an older magical experience of the aura of all things. But is a presupposition of our science and technology not a reason that has to render nature mute and meaningless? Such a reason cannot make sense of the phenomenon of aura except as a projection of meaning into matter that as such lacks meaning. And are human beings not part of nature? The question returns us to Nietzsche’s pronouncement in *The Birth of Tragedy* that only as an aesthetic phenomenon can human existence be justified. If this is accepted, the distinction, so important to Benjamin, between the Fascist aestheticization of politics and the Marxist politicization of art has to collapse for all politics then rests on an aesthetic foundation. What allows us, or Benjamin, in this age of the technical reproducibility, not just of works of art, but increasingly of everything, to hold on to a fundamental distinction between the aura of human beings and the aura of works of art and natural objects? Are

¹¹³ Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” p. 188.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

not even human beings today in danger of losing that special aura that distinguishes persons from their simulacra? Think of artificial hearts! Of cloning! What in principle distinguishes a person from a robot with a computer brain?

6

In the preceding lectures I pointed out that Descartes' promise, that the new science he had helped inaugurate would render human beings the masters and possessor of nature, was hardly idle. Today the spirit of such mastery presides over our world: artifice threatens to embrace the environment so completely that at moments it seems to all but vanish in the embrace, pushed to the peripheries of our postmodern culture, where in wilderness preserves we may still meet with vestiges of what once was "the desert of the real itself."¹¹⁶ The last is an expression I borrowed from Baudrillard. Baudrillard conjures up a world, where image is no longer "the reflection of a profound reality," no longer "masks and denatures a profound reality," no longer even "masks the absence of a profound reality," but instead "has no relation to any reality whatsoever" and "is its own pure simulacrum."¹¹⁷ Half fascinated, half appalled, Baudrillard envisions a world that seems to announce its coming in phenomena like the giant Mall of America next to the Minneapolis airport, which may be considered the flagship of countless similar malls. I shall not bother here to demonstrate that the thought of an image "that has no relation to any reality whatsoever: that is its own pure simulacrum" is finally as incoherent as the Cartesian thought experiment of a dream standing in no relation to any reality. As Descartes knew, and to show this was the point of his thought experiment, such thoughts inevitably presuppose what they would call into question. Nor shall I bother to show that the world in which most of us most of the time actually live, love, suffer, and die, remains quite distant from such postmodern fantasies. But let me accept Baudrillard's dismal prophecy as at least an illuminating caricature. What then makes this caricature so disturbing? How are we to understand our nostalgia for a natural environment uncontaminated by simulacra, for beauty not born of artifice? In the Mall of America

¹¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1994), p. 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

such nostalgia surfaces again and again: for example in an Alpine stream, cascading through mock rock, in art shops specializing in kitschy representations of landscapes from which everything that might suggest technology has been carefully banished, in travel agencies that with their posters call the visitor to the sand, water, and air of some pristine Caribbean island. But what are we really losing when we trade real for mock rock? Are we not dealing in both cases with mute matter? Is it more than nostalgia that endows the former with its special aura? And just what is wrong with artifice? Why not compensate ourselves for the ugliness of an environment shaped by our own understanding of what constitutes an acceptable standard of living, including demands for cheap energy, for a high degree of physical and spiritual mobility, with images that let us dream of a very different world, a world that increasingly seems to belong to a past that cannot be recovered? Why not enjoy such images without having to surrender comforts that have come to seem almost an inalienable right? What is wrong with artificial environments that mimic beautiful nature, but without the ants, scorpions, centipedes, and jellyfish that can make Caribbean beaches quite unpleasant? Why not enjoy artificial environments such as the Mall of America, with its own heaven and earth? Are such artificial environments not anticipations of that paradise regained on the basis of technology of which already Francis Bacon and Descartes, these founding heroes of modernity, were dreaming?

Why then do such environments frighten us — at least some of us? Do such artificial environments not have their own beauty, a beauty more exciting than the edge of some ordinary beach? And does the success of such malls not speak for itself? Why should such figures or anticipations of some future world that would no longer have an outside at all, that really would be what Baudrillard takes our world already to be, a world of simulacra, why should such figures disturb us? Why do the simulacra we are offered fail to satisfy? Why is mock-rock like mock-sausages in butcher shops that cannot nourish, although they may increase our desire for the real thing?

Because, I want to suggest, in such a world we would find ourselves increasingly disembodied and alone, would turn ourselves into simulacra, increasingly indifferent to our own and the world's fate. In such a world, our own being, along with the being of persons and things would lose its weight, would become unbearably light. Our sense of

reality, inseparably tied to a sense of our own reality, demands that we remain open to that rift within us between spirit and body, where openness to the body is also openness to what eludes all our attempts to master and possess reality. Full self-affirmation demands an affirmation of what Heidegger called the earth.

The awareness that what we have before us is not really rock, but only simulates one, threatens to reduce what presents itself to our eyes to a mere spectacle. It threatens to transform the experience into one that does not involve our whole being and that, because of the privilege here given to the eye at the expense of the whole body with its cares and interests, robs what is experienced of its weight. Mock rock loses the aura of the real. But such loss inevitably diminishes our sense of our own reality. And the same is true of an environment of simulacra. To the de-realization of things corresponds the de-realization of the subject. Openness to the reality of the real, whose vestiges, according to Baudrillard, persist in the increasingly artificial environment we have created, lets the self return to itself. Is it not this that lets us long for wilderness?

In the *Critique of Judgment* Kant wonders how it would affect us to learn that what we thought the call of a nightingale was in fact produced by a boy an innkeeper had hired some beautiful summer evening to heighten the enjoyment of his guests. The assumption here is that what is heard remains indistinguishable from the song of the true nightingale. From a purely aesthetic point of view, it would seem, there should be no reason to rank one above the other. We might even prefer the simulacrum, which demonstrates the skill of the performer. Nevertheless, Kant suggests, once we learn of the deception, what we hear loses its aura; we hear the same melody, but without the former interest and pleasure, which shows that more is involved in our appreciation of beautiful nature than just the appreciation of beautiful forms. What matters to Kant is that these forms are experienced by us as products of nature, as not born of artifice. Something in nature here appears to respond to our intellect and its demands, and Kant here does not hesitate to invoke the medieval understanding of nature as a text: the beauties of nature present themselves to us as ciphers addressed to us.¹¹⁸ Spirit without

¹¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, par. 42, A170-171/B172-173; trans. Werner S. Pluhar, *Critique of Judgment* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), p. 169.

seems to speak to our own spirit. In beautiful nature we feel at home. The experience of the beauty of the environment promises a genuine homecoming.

But has Benjamin not taught us to recognize the self-deception that supports such an experience? What sense can we still make of talk of spirit dwelling in nature? A religious person might have an answer. But has the progress of science not replaced the book of nature with an understanding of nature as the totality of essentially mute facts, to be used by us as we see fit and are able? More questions are raised by Kant's claim that "an immediate interest in the beauty of nature ... is always the mark of a good soul," that the appreciation of the beauty of nature is "akin to the moral feeling."¹¹⁹ How are we to understand such kinship?

What links the two is that both involve something like a recognition of an incarnation of spirit in matter. To be sure, as Kant emphasizes, science can know nothing of such an incarnation. And yet such incarnation is a presupposition of any ethics. Morality presupposes that we experience others as persons deserving respect. But this is to say that we must be able to experience the other person as more than just an object among objects, say as a very complicated robot governed by a computer so complicated that it successfully simulates human intelligence. The other must present him- or herself to me as spirit incarnated in this particular matter. I must experience that person's special aura. Were I to learn that what I took to be a person was just some mechanical reproduction, I would no longer experience the aura that alone lets me recognize the other as a person, like myself. I would lose what lets me know that I am not alone. Edmund Burke touches on a matter of profound importance when, in his *Enquiry*, he links the pleasure we take in beauty to the "passions which belong to society" — where he distinguishes "the society of the sexes" from that "more general society, which we have with men and with other animals, and which we may in some sort be said to have even with the inanimate world."¹²⁰

But even if we grant that the recognition of persons presupposes an experience of aura that is more than just a registration of mute facts, that here we experience

¹¹⁹ Ibid. pp. 165-168.

¹²⁰ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. and intro. J. T. Boulton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), Part One, Section VIII, p. 40.

incarnations of spirit in matter, what justifies Kant's claim that recognition of beauty in nature, too, presupposes an openness to meaning of which we are not the authors? Kant might answer that even though science cannot know anything resembling an incarnation of spirit in matter, its pursuit of truth nonetheless presupposes experiences of the intelligibility, or as he would put it, of the purposiveness of nature. Kant's theory of knowledge thus has its foundation in his aesthetics. And this claim can be generalized: the very self-assertion that leads human beings oppose themselves to nature as its masters and possessors presupposes, not just sensation, but a perception of significant patterns or family resemblances, as Schopenhauer, and following him, Wittgenstein were to put it. All concept formation presupposes perceptions of meaning in matter, of meaning that cannot be manufactured, but must be received as a gift. Kant takes such perception to be an experience of beauty, understood as purposiveness without a purpose. There is thus an intimate link between my ability to appreciate the beauty of the natural environment and my ability to experience the other as a person. Both are perceptions of spirit incarnated in matter, answering to our own spirit. Both give us to understand that we are not lost in the world, but at home in it.

In the "Introduction" to the *Critique of Judgment* Kant is thus concerned to show, not only that aesthetic judgments are a presupposition of the work of science, but also that they build a bridge between nature as known to science and morality. To build that bridge they have to provide us with an understanding of nature that is wider than the understanding of nature at which science aims, have to provide us with experiences of meaning incarnated in matter. That is to say, ethics, too, presupposes an appreciation of the aura of persons and things.

7

At this point you may be wondering whether in embracing the central argument of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* I have not forgotten the beginning of this lecture, which suggested that given the understanding of reality that presides over our science and technology works of art and things of nature do not have to lose the aura they once possessed. Does the medieval understanding of nature as a book in which God speaks to us not lie so thoroughly behind us that Kant's invocation of it should be understood as no

more than just a rhetorical embellishment, not to be taken too seriously? And what modern aesthete would follow Kant in placing the beauty of nature so decisively above the beauty of art? Did Hegel not have good reason to exclude the beauty of nature from his *Aesthetics*? Hegel justifies this exclusion by insisting that “the beauty of art is the beauty that is born — born again, that is — of the mind; and by as much as the mind and its products are higher than nature and its appearances, by so much the beauty of art is higher than the beauty of Nature. Indeed, if we look at it formally, i. e. only considering in what way it exists, not what there is in it, even a silly fancy such as may pass through a man’s head is higher than any product of nature.”¹²¹ The young Hegel’s response to the Alps is telling:

Neither the eye nor the imagination finds in these formless masses any point on which it could rest with pleasure or where they might be engaged or find something to play with. Only the mineralogist finds here material for insufficient conjectures concerning the revolutions of these mountain ranges. Reason finds in the thought of the permanence of these mountains or in the kind of sublimity that is ascribed to them nothing that impresses it, that demands wonder and admiration. Seeing these dead masses gave me nothing but the monotonous and in time boring idea: this is the way it is.¹²²

Nature is thought here by Hegel, in characteristically modern fashion, to be mute material to be understood, appropriated, and used by us as we see fit. A crystal can be called beautiful, but the beauty of its geometric faces is really the product of our own spirit, which recognizes in their geometry something of itself. With greater justice a city, or just a ploughed field, can be called beautiful, for in both cases human beings have labored to impose an order on matter. Nature has been subjected to the human spirit. Considered just in itself, Hegel insists, nature cannot be considered beautiful. “Mind, and mind only, is capable of truth, and comprehends in itself all that is, so that whatever is beautiful can only be really and truly beautiful as partaking in this higher element and as created

¹²¹ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, vol. 12, p. 20; trans. p. 4.

¹²² Hegel, “Auszüge aus dem Tagebuch der Reise in die Berner Oberalpen (25. Juli bis August 1796)” *Werke*, 20 vols., ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1971), vol. 1, *Frühe Schriften*, p. 618.

thereby. In this sense the beauty of nature reveals itself as but a reflection of the beauty which belongs to the mind, as an imperfect, incomplete mode of being, as a mode whose really substantial element is contained in the mind itself.”¹²³ Kant had a very different understanding of beauty: he leaves no doubt that for him the ground of all artificial beauty finally is the beauty of a nature that transcends our understanding.

Hegel knows of course that human beings, too, are animals and as such part of nature. But human beings are animals that by virtue of their reason raise themselves above nature, become conscious of it, experience it, including their own nature, as not simply given, but as material to be understood, shaped, and bent to their will instructed by their reason. Their spirit places human beings in opposition to nature, demands mastery over it. In something as simple as a child throwing stones into the water and enjoying the rings formed Hegel finds evidence of this drive. Already in such childish play human beings seek to appropriate the natural given by transforming it in their own image and this means first of all in the image of their own spirit. History is understood by Hegel as the progress of such appropriation. Art, too, is part of the effort to make the natural and sensible our own, to rob it of its character of being a mute, alien other by investing it with the aura of the human, and thus to help transform the earth into a dwelling place fit for human beings, into something that deserves to be called home. The goal of art, too, is such humanization of the sensible, where humanization here means spiritualization. So understood art prefigures technology, which allows for a far more effective mastery of nature and for that very reason eventually overtakes art and leaves it behind. Here we have a key to Hegel’s thesis of the death of art in its highest sense. And just as decisively as Hegel would have us place the beauty of art above the beauty of nature, he would have us place the beauty of artificial environments above the beauty of natural environments. Kant’s nightingale argues for a very different understanding of nature.

Hegel’s understanding of the progress and end of art is hardly derived from a careful examination of the evidence provided by the history of art. It represents rather an at times willful fitting of the evidence into a schema that is derived from his own determination of the essence of art and its place in the progress of spirit. But as

¹²³ Hegel, *Vorlesungen*, vol. 12, p. 21; trans. p. 4

Heidegger recognized, regardless of details, in its essentials that determination is difficult to get around. *If* we grant Hegel the importance he grants spirit and freedom, do we not grant him the substance of his case? If human freedom demands that the individual liberate him- or herself from the accidents of what happens to be the case, then our real home should not be sought by looking towards the aura of some mountain range or branch, to some particular place and its *genius loci*. Must our real home not be a spiritual home to which nothing sensible can finally do justice? Consider in this connection the recurrent insistence on the inessential nature of what is considered the accident of location, birth, gender, race. Is the attempt to discover one's home in a particular landscape not born of a nostalgia that we should not allow to rule our lives and build us our homes? Hegel's philosophy is born of the confidence that human beings, bound only by the authority of their own reason, today find themselves on the threshold of true autonomy. Our aggressive appropriation and transformation of the environment appears from this perspective as but an aspect of humanity's coming of age. Are there not many today who feel already more at home in cyberspace than in any natural environment?

8

Let me return once more to Kant's two nightingales. Kant, as I pointed out, assumes that the song of the artificial nightingale cannot be distinguished from that of its natural counterpart: the relevant aesthetic object would seem to be the same in the two cases. And yet: the song of the real nightingale, he insists, has an aura that its simulacrum does not possess. The loss of that aura let's us become bored with the latter, let's us dismiss it as no more than rather superficial entertainment. Something analogous can be said about real flowers and their simulacra.

But just what is it that gives the real nightingale or the real flower its special aura? How are we to understand this sense that what we are experiencing is not something artificial, that it is not a product of our own spirit that here seems to speak to us, but spirit incarnated in nature? Whatever it is, it must be a bit like feeling the heaviness of the stone. It weighs on us, touches us. It is essentially the same sense that gives a special aura to each individual: we are touched. The others plight weighs on us; the other's joy lifts us, too. Suppose a person we thought we loved turned out to be a mechanical

puppet: our love would disintegrate, as does the poet's love for Olimpia in E. T. A. Hoffmann's tale *Der Sandmann*.

Beauty alone, Kant's example of the two nightingales teaches us, is not enough. Representations or reproductions of beautiful nature need not preserve the aura of the original. That is the lesson of Kant's nightingale: the beauty of nature, including human nature, lets us feel at home in the world as artificial beauty is unable to do. The beauty of art must remain grounded in the beauty of nature. We need art to open windows in the house objectifying reason has, windows to nature, including our own nature.

One final observation: one of the most striking achievements of our technology has been the progress of astronautics, the possibility it has opened up of leaving the earth, leading to dreams of extraterrestrial life. But despite the enormous advances that have been made, no alternative to the earth has presented itself. Pictures of our earth from outer space have only led to a keener awareness that this is the only home we shall ever have. This is a point that should be enlarged to include all of science and technology with their promise of hardly dreamed of virtual realities. But no more than in outer space will we be able to feel at home in virtual reality or in mechanical reproductions of our natural environment. This is something that we are beginning to learn, painful though this lesson may be. We must take care to preserve this home, our earth, not just for us, but for coming generations. Such care demands a changed frame of mind. Kant thought that the appreciation of beauty presupposed a common sense. Perhaps appreciation of the beauty of nature can build a common sense strong enough to put in its proper place a thinking that, left unchecked, while seeking to master and possess the environment, can in the end only mutilate and destroy it and us. We need art to provide such thinking with a check.