

chapter twelveBEAUTY UNDER TRIAL
BY MODERNITY

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It seems banal to say that over the past century Harmonia, a daughter of Aphrodite and Ares, has demonstrated her kinship only with her father, the god of war, but not with her mother, the goddess of love. It is, perhaps, offensive to put it so bluntly. There is an understandable need to be proud of the time in which one lives and to regard the art created in one's own time as great art. We do not say yet that progress in art exists—such a thing was never claimed—but we are used to thinking that we are freer and more highly developed than our predecessors, and therefore it is easy to conclude that our art is better, freer, more developed, and less artificial than the art of the past. And if so, why did it happen that Harmonia betrayed the heritage of her mother? Traces of the presence of Aphrodite are hardly noticeable in the art of the twentieth century. Even after the total victory over fascism, after the apparent victory of democracy in the world, we produce art where love does not exist. If I were to ask you to name just five recent examples of visual art that are dedicated to the idea of Love, I doubt that you could do so. Art has become brutal and sharp, furious and powerful—and the more brutal it is, the more often we say that it is great art. Of course, the past century was a hard one, and it is difficult to dispute that it was horrible, but was it so hard that it completely changed the laws of harmony? The child of Aphrodite has passed through difficult times, not once but many times: why did this special

century change her features so completely? We could put this question even more simply: Is it still the same Harmonia we knew before? Have the sorrow and sufferings of mankind changed her features at one stroke, and forever?

A brief glance at contemporary art and at the art of the past century immediately brings us to a controversial conclusion. We still use the word “beauty” while talking about art, but it is obvious that the beauty of our days looks somewhat different from the beauty of the Renaissance or the beauty of classical antiquity. There is almost no doubt that Hegel would have been shocked by the art of Malevich, and that Lessing would have been surprised to find that the artistic image today depicts not the moment *before* catharsis but *after* it—or even something that happened *instead of* catharsis. And sometimes we even ask ourselves whether beauty is still the key characteristic of art. Hasn’t it been replaced by something else? And if so, what? Is there something in our brave new world, something very significant, as important as beauty was, but more relevant? Talking about art, writing about art, debating problems that arise in connection with art, we use words that have become touchstones. It is curious to find out what kind of definitions we use today instead of beauty. Thus, we proudly pronounce the word “actual,” the word “radical,” the word “contemporary”—and in a way all these words are a kind of surrogate for essential criteria, for something as essential as “beauty” was before. But still, after nearly half a century of debates about new art, these new criteria are not well articulated. We have to agree that surrogates like “radical” and “actual” do not tell us much and do not play exactly the same role that the criterion of “beauty” once did.

There is one simple thing that is very hard to understand, but it seems to me that only our admission of misunderstanding may lead us to put things right. It is nearly impossible to understand what was wrong with the beauty that served as a guideline for Michelangelo and Mantegna, and why that good old beauty became useless in contemporary history. It is clear that the creator of a medieval cathedral, or Michelangelo, Van Gogh, and even Picasso employed the same criteria, but then suddenly something very important happened, and these criteria became useless. The appearance of penicillin, to take a random example of modernity, in principle should not be followed by the statement that from now on beauty is no longer beautiful. Why did it become necessary to blame the old beauty for its incongruity? There is no clear explanation

for this (although a few explanations exist and we should examine them). Beauty—and I will not be much mistaken if I use Plato’s view as expressing the common understanding of the problem of beauty—was a certain basis of things, a certain skeleton of being. It used to be an essence that existed everywhere; every aspect of life had to be measured by the existence of beauty; it was the essential measure of things. It is no exaggeration to say that virtue is beautiful, and beauty is nothing less than a virtue. But if so, how could beauty have lost its position?

There is a great paradox here, which almost all art historians have noticed: if beauty is the core of all things and the foundation of the universe, how could it happen that changes in little things changed the essential thing? However, it did, indeed, happen: beauty was accused of many sins and was put on trial. There were many enthusiasts who participated in this trial: avant-garde artists and radical philosophers, political leaders and market dealers, museum curators and bankers who sponsored the arts. It was a very well-organized process. Today, I wish to remind you of the very important metaphor created by Sandro Botticelli in his great painting *La Calunnia* (The Lie), a painting he made following a piece by the ancient Greek painter Apelles as described by Lucian. We see there naked Beauty embodying Truth, and this naked, defenseless, beautiful Truth is being tried by ugly judges and is trying to raise her voice, but there is little chance that anyone hears her words. We can see that an innocent person has been falsely accused; it is obvious that Beauty is going to lose this trial, and we are unable to help her. It is curious to compare this painting by Botticelli with the famous phrase of Dostoevsky, “Beauty will save the world.” It is clear from the painting that in order to have any chance of saving the world, Beauty must first hire herself a good lawyer. If I attempt today to advocate for the lady in the painting, it is only because I simply do not understand what wrong she did. Something happened and she lost her position. But what was it? I am going to try to follow events without emotions—just to understand why she was condemned and who was elected to take her place.

There was a time when beauty was a criterion of action and behavior, of public and political life, of human features and intellectual development. In a way, it was evidence of our belief in a harmoniously structured world. There may be war and there may be hunger, we may be ill and we will die, but there is a measure of events that allows us to judge, that gives us hope that we will leave to our successors knowledge and experience.



Figure 12.1. Botticelli, *La Calunnia (The Calumny of Apelles)*, 1497–98. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Courtesy Bridgeman Art Library International.

We may not believe in the justice rendered by a particular judge, but we do trust that the law (in our case, the law of harmony) in principle exists.

Observing the current situation, we should agree that such hope no longer sustains us. We used to think that harmony was a kind of balance, a wise equilibrium between extremes. Principles of harmony that we used to borrow from Hegel's aesthetics tell us of measures and symmetry, balance and pleasure of observation. However—and we are well prepared for this statement—our reality sometimes calls for brutal effects in art. To reflect our time, to be honest in our description of reality, we should not turn away from disasters. We are no longer able (at least many people feel this way) to rely on old standards and proportions because reality has broken them, and balance has been completely destroyed. We all used to hope that beauty would reappear as a result of our efforts, and if the artist in his work had to overcome his experience (sad experience, probably), then he would be rewarded in the end with a catharsis that would save us all. The old rules of art (the standards of classicism and the canons of the Middle Ages) were replaced with new ones created to conform to the circumstances of the moment. Artists of the twentieth century did everything they could to break with peaceful symmetry and to change the proportions of figures in order to depict horror and war. We all know how, line by line, the classical features of portraits did change, from the slight deformations of Rembrandt to the more evident ones of Goya, then to Van Gogh, then to Picasso, and to Bacon. While changing the shape of the human image, the artist always hopes that we—the spectators—keep the whole structure of the image in mind, and that we always compare the changes made today with the general idea. And at some point in the future—when we have overcome horror by honestly depicting it—beauty will be back; it will return in its whole shape, it will blossom through the dust. In fact, *any* deformation of the human image is only possible so long as the *idea* of the human image is not forgotten and remains unchanged. The idea remains as a measure of any change. Eventually, the idea and the appearance of the idea in our reality will become identical with each other, and this will happen through catharsis. And it is hard to deny the logic of such a statement: the whole experience of the art of Goya, Van Gogh, or Picasso proves it. We can recall hundreds of examples of sad and even painful images that impart to us the idea of beauty. Even if the subject of a painting is sad, the whole structure of the image used to inspire in the spectator a feeling of harmony. We used to know that the principle of

catharsis, introduced by Aristotle, would turn tragedy into a great lesson and triumph of good will. The best example, and a very clear one, is the Crucifixion. It is obviously a deeply sad plot, depicting humiliation and pain, but still millions of believers look at the image of the Crucifixion each day, finding hope and faith in this awful subject.

So far, this may sound convincing, but there is one point that casts doubt on our whole argument. The principle of tragedy that tells us that pain and sorrow may cleanse the soul of its individuality and lead it to beauty through contemplation—this principle works only up to a certain, very important point. *The principle of tragedy works only as long as the subject of tragedy exists.* Once tragedy ceases to have a subject, there is no tragedy anymore. Murder and massacre may exist, but catharsis will not result. Contemporary times show us that it is possible to be a witness to murder, but the soul of the spectator does not become better. Massacre, torture, and death do not necessarily turn to catharsis that cleanses souls, and this is the bitter lesson that we have been taught by the aesthetics of the twentieth century.

There is one rather provocative question (and I am going to try to answer it later): Can abstract art embody tragedy? We have to agree that contemporary art has lost (or has almost lost) anthropomorphism. The art objects we find in museums of contemporary art tell us of many different emotions, but there is no story about the human being. It is obvious that stones, bricks, pieces of wood, spots, and lines can express energy, but they do not embody the human being. The simple questions are: Can tragedy happen, and may catharsis appear, in the absence of a human being? Is it possible to undergo catharsis if there is no subject of tragedy?

And if catharsis is no longer possible, then the whole structure of art studies has to be changed. An age that Eric Hobsbawm called the “age of extremes” has changed a great deal: as a matter of fact, it shows us that balance is not possible between extremes. Balance between force and tenderness, power and faith, beauty and might—balance that must be one of the main characteristics of harmony—no longer exists, because each of the extremes has become self-sufficient. At least, art (or what we presently consider to be art) no longer embodies an equilibrium of extremes. All that we consider to be evidence of our brutal world reflects power and force much more than it does beauty and love. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, is nearly forgotten, and yet Ares, the god of war, shows his presence almost everywhere. And if we are to talk about their children, it is not

Eros and Harmonia, but Phobos and Deimos, the gods of fear and terror, who are relevant today.

Even if we agree that beauty still exists in our time but has only changed its features, there are five main questions that we must answer.

- (1) Does beauty still exist as an idea and ideal, or does it appear a posteriori as a result of our efforts?
- (2) Does beauty exist for itself or does it have a didactic use? Plato pointed out that Eros seeking beauty may be not beautiful himself (otherwise why should he seek it?). Ergo: May the idea of beauty that we trace in its development embody itself in a set of ugly objects? Is it correct then to say that beauty is not beautiful anymore but still represents the *idea* of beauty?
- (3) If catharsis still exists, does it need a human being, or does it bring to a certain emotional height some other element of existence, not necessarily a human being? And how should we define the forces that have replaced the human being as the subject of tragedy?
- (4) If the current characteristics of beauty are absolutely different from those of classical antiquity and Modernity, should we conclude that these new criteria have nothing to do with Christianity and the synthesis of Christian and ancient art?
- (5) Does the current meaning of beauty reflect social life as evidently as it did in the Middle Ages and through the Renaissance? If so, what can we say about the aesthetic and ethical standards and approaches of a triumphant democracy?

It is obvious that among other achievements, the twentieth century can boast dramatic, global changes in art, at least in so-called Western art, or, better, the art of Christian culture. Most probably, in the history of the last two thousand years, art has undergone such global changes only twice before: in the fourth and fifth centuries, when Christian art became a real power after being recognized in the Late Roman empire, and in the Renaissance, when a new synthesis of ancient and Christian art was established. Needless to say, the concept of beauty did change during those periods. The movement we now call the avant-garde produced yet another global change, and the character of that change is highly significant. Observing the period from the beginning of the last century to the beginning of this one, we should say that in a mere one hundred years more change

occurred in the plastic arts, in ideas, and in the forms of art than in the previous five hundred years. We can be sure that such change was demanded by history: the avant-garde movement conquered the world almost at a stroke, as swiftly as a well-equipped and trained army takes a weak city.

Before I start talking about avant-garde aesthetics and their influence on all aspects of our life, I wish to emphasize an important point. It is impossible to deny that we are living in the age of avant-garde aesthetics and that avant-garde values have replaced the age that we could briefly name the age of the Renaissance. However, I am convinced that a new age does not replace the previous age as precisely as one guard relieves another at the gates of Buckingham Palace. My opinion is that several ages may live simultaneously, and several ages following their own ways may be neighbors in history. They flow parallel to one another, like different currents in the sea. A cold current and a warm one can flow together and may even intermix. For instance, for a long time the Christian paradigm coexisted with the ancient idea of beauty and employed it—and I am speaking now not about Renaissance art but about the early period of Christianity. Supplanting the classical paradigm was not accomplished in a moment, or even in a hundred years, and it was never fully done until the end. We observe something similar now, as the Christian paradigm, avant-garde ideas, and the pagan vitality of the contemporary world all coexist and sometimes feed one another and become intertwined. To assess any one of these, we have to define precisely what this particular current is about; and even more, we have to understand whether this particular current is able to exist alone.

To give a very simple and obvious example, I wish to turn to a popular Christian image, one of the earliest ones: the image of a shepherd with a lamb. This image appeared as early as the second century, and, curiously enough, it was done like a figure of a classical athlete with impressive muscles and a well-developed body. The image of the shepherd-athlete harked back to the images that early Christian artists knew from Roman tombs, and the shepherd had distinct Roman features. Over the next hundred years the shepherd gradually lost his muscles; he became thin and skinny, and it is obvious that his new image appeared as a protest against those “athletes” who delivered Christian saints to the lions or to prison. But before this happened, the idea of the Good Shepherd and the idea of Discobolus could live side by side without necessarily contradicting each other. It took about fifteen centuries for these two



Figure 12.2. *The Good Shepherd* (fresco), 3rd c. Catacomb of Priscilla, Rome. De Agostini Picture Library/G. Cargagna. Courtesy Bridgeman Art Library International.

plastic ideas to meet up again, and it was Michelangelo who gave back to the saints their muscles.

Having said this—having said that many currents and many epochs may live side by side in one historical time—I turn to the main hero of our own time, to the avant-garde. And we should start not even with a definition but with a denial of the very possibility of a definition. Through this denial we can reach certain conclusions.

First of all, the avant-garde appeared in our history as a movement of a very few, as the voice of a brave minority. Select individuals represented this movement, and they were soundly rebuffed by the traditional majority. In fact, the term “avant-garde” meant a small group of brave men deployed far in advance of the main army. And we have to admit today that this term no longer expresses the essence of the avant-garde. Today, avant-garde aesthetics are appreciated by the absolute majority of the Christian world. Everybody, even those who do not *like* these aesthetics, must declare publicly that they admire them, if only to avoid being labeled as retrograde. To put it succinctly, the avant-garde is not the avant-garde anymore, but the regular troops.

Second, the avant-garde appeared as a movement of rebels who opposed market and commerce in principle. Their main principle was that art has to serve people, and not false values. We must admit today that avant-garde achievements in the marketplace are far more impressive than any achievements of early Italian, classical French, or Greco-Roman art. Of course, in art history there are plenty of artists who became rich after long periods of obscurity: the list appears long, including Impressionists, Dutch artists from the seventeenth century, and so on. However, none of those artists expressed the wish to be and to remain poor. Yet it is the main doctrine of the avant-garde that has been turned on its head. If audiences today do not entirely trust the programs of avant-garde artists, they have good reasons.

Third, the avant-garde appeared as a utopian project. The principal aim of this art movement was to create a new type of life—indeed, an egalitarian world—opposed to the capitalism and hierarchy of the traditional society. Some of the artists had communist programs, some had fascist programs, some were totally disoriented in their social programs, but the goal of an avant-garde artist always remained the same: the creation of a utopia. Sometimes avant-garde leaders spoke directly about social programs (such as Marinetti, Mayakovsky, Filonov), sometimes

they presented concepts in their art that set forth new prescriptions for social life even more explicitly than any written program (I think here of Malevich and Tatlin). These constructions of the new world were the most significant undertaking of the avant-garde. Their projects were openly debated with viewers in public discussions. And this utopia definitely demanded changes in the current political structure that amounted to a revolution. In short, the avant-garde advocated the destruction of all privileges and the creation of new projects to protect the poor. However, in reality the so-called avant-garde has become a serious defender of the old world and no longer advocates for the poor, who in fact, do not even know the avant-garde art of today. Art that calls itself avant-garde is so deeply embedded in capitalist society that all proclamations and promises of utopia have been forgotten. The avant-garde accepted all of the privileges it could from the existing world order. We have to admit that, while starting out as a socialist idea, the avant-garde became strongly conservative in its social program and lent its support not to the poor but to the rich. If, in the very beginning, the art of the avant-garde was presented to crowds in public squares, now it belongs to wealthy individuals, who keep their pieces of avant-garde art in their homes and mansions, well protected from any crowd.

Fourth, the avant-garde artists started their activity as part of a functional social structure, intent on working hard and resolving concrete problems. Artists viewed themselves as workers, carpenters, builders, and cleaners of the dirty streets of the world rather than as practitioners of fine arts. Their job was not to produce useless canvases depicting landscapes but to design new houses, not to please the polished public with portraits of their children but to design kindergartens. Practical needs had to be the test of art. If society can *use* this particular thing practically, only then can we consider it a respectable work of art. However, today we have to say that the avant-garde is anything but functional. It serves exclusively decorative purposes. Large collections of contemporary art are difficult to preserve, since it is not possible to hang many of the works on the walls. But there is no other way to use them: they are totally useless. No one can come up with any practical use for squares and spots, iron plates and installations, other than as decoration. It is important to add that not every space and not every room is able to house these useless objects, but only very large and very rich venues. Applied art that still calls itself avant-garde resembles today the applied art of ancient Eastern

despotic monarchies (Babylon, for instance) more than the functional art of Western democratic societies. Looking at contemporary art museums, which are built in very specific ways—not functional, but decorative—we are more likely to think of Oriental fairy tales, of palaces from the One Thousand and One Nights, rather than a simple Western house.

Fifth, the avant-garde appeared in society with an avowed intention to scare people. It was to be a kind of *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, a prophecy of doom, that the avant-garde wrote on the walls of a complacent Western society. Fear and angst were the effects that artists and poets deliberately tried to create with their work. By showing dead bodies, sliced eyes, hanged men, murder victims, and so forth, artists tried to shock the philistines, to take them out of their accustomed “impressionist” environment and into a new and dangerous situation. Look at bitter reality! cried the avant-garde. That reality is shocking! Beauty no longer exists! However, this special kind of ugliness soon became a substitute for beauty: while continually repeating the same effect of angst, art arrived at certain standards, certain inner canons of ugliness. The law of harmony in art (which exists due to the simple facts of our possibilities as viewers, even if we deny its existence) dictates that when the production of fear and ugliness becomes industrialized, when certain standards of their production are established, then at that moment a certain kind of harmony appears. These standards and canons inevitably lead to the creation of a certain form, for without form there can be no standard in art. And where form and proportions exist, harmony appears. And in this way, through the standardization of ugliness, we return to the idea of beauty or, I should say, to its surrogate.

Ugliness is a negation of form: to express something ugly we must show the destruction of form. But if we repeat the process of destruction again and again, if we make ruins and shocking symbols a constant form, by this act we make ugliness a substitute for beauty. Thus, the art of the avant-garde assumed a very curious position: spectators accepted angst and fear as necessary components of *being comfortable*, and they came to require small doses of shock to make their comfortable life even more attractive. We consume a little bit of high-quality ugliness and well-produced angst to make ourselves even jollier. In fact, we consider these well-produced doses of angst a kind of necessary component of comfort, and ugliness as a strict path to beauty, since here we are returning to laws of harmony, to proportion and balance, which we rejected previously in classical art.

Such an ironic return to harmony at a later juncture in the historical process may also be found in society's attitude toward the revolutionary slogans pronounced by the avant-garde. Society was once afraid that the avant-garde made revolution appealing and might shake the whole comfortable edifice of culture and state. However, with the help of the avant-garde, society found ways to minimize the risk of revolution. Nowadays revolution lives in small homeopathic doses in avant-garde decorative art, and each museum or wealthy collector gladly welcomes this leftist message, which works like a carefully administered vaccination. Thus, society has welcomed the typical figure of today, the contemporary artist, as domesticated rebel, obliging insurgent, and glamorous fighter. This is all very convenient to society, and it will be hard to deny that it is very convenient to the avant-garde fighters. We can see that the third contradiction is also resolved in this way: after all, the avant-garde finally got its practical mission and meets a practical need! Now it protects society from conflicts and dangers, which it helps to confine to the exhibition halls of contemporary art museums. With the help of this ugly, "revolutionary" art, our society will undergo a purging catharsis, and there is no need to know about the real sorrows of the world. Who wishes to go to Afghanistan or Rwanda, who wants to know the problems of hunger too intimately? Who wishes to face the people of Africa? All these extremes, all the danger of the real world, may be experienced in a museum of contemporary art in convenient homeopathic doses. After visiting an avant-garde exhibition we all have a special feeling that is in great demand: we have met with something *actual*. Needless to say, all this is a specially concocted lie. To recall the metaphor of *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, we can see that Belshazzar himself, in the Book of Daniel, now orders these inscriptions to be made on the walls of his palace in Babylon in order to inspire a heartier appetite. And if one of these words is ever erased, then Belshazzar immediately orders a new one to be inscribed.

Now for my sixth point, the most outrageous one. We used to associate the avant-garde with radical statements. And indeed, the avant-garde has many times called for war and violence, but surprisingly, we can hardly find avant-garde artists on the battlefield, in hospitals, or among soldiers. These are completely different things: to inspire fear in society and to protect society. Hemingway and Camus dedicated their efforts to opposing the war, but it is difficult to call them representatives of the avant-garde. In principle, we must finally come to terms with what it means to describe

the avant-garde as *radical*. Does it mean that members of this artistic movement went to impoverished neighborhoods to help the poor? Does it mean that they went to hospitals to risk their lives among infected patients? Does it mean that they went to Africa to build houses and hospitals for the native people? Not at all; Albert Schweitzer and Claude Lévi-Strauss were never considered avant-garde thinkers. Then does “radical” mean strict opposition to the ruling classes, to power? We know that many artists were arrested, and even killed—Mandelstam, Babel, and many others. And talking about the tragic fate of Russian intellectuals under Stalin, we all know that Pasternak, Akhmatova, Zoschenko, and Bulgakov were pursued by power. We have to say without any exaggeration that it was genuinely dangerous to be an intellectual in those days. But—and please forgive me for being strict—I do not find many names of avant-garde artists among the victims of totalitarian regimes.

I have to stress a very serious aspect of the relations between the avant-garde and political power. Through all the troubles of the past century—wars, revolutions, terror, and violence—we cannot cite a single example of an avant-garde artist who opposed a totalitarian regime and who condemned violence. We all know writers such as Hemingway and Camus, Sartre and Mandelstam, Bertold Brecht and Chaplin, we know artists such as Petrov-Vodkin and Georg Gross, Käthe Kollwitz and Picasso, artists who produced rather traditional images that were sometimes used to show the injustice and cruelty of power. They showed us the sufferings of human beings, ruined lives, and the ugly features of power. But not a single one of these artists could be called a pure representative of the avant-garde. And sometimes we have a strange feeling about the brutal declarations pronounced by Malevich and Rodchenko, by Marinetti and Tristan Tzara: they were provocative, but not radical at all. What this contradiction implies for the notion that beauty embodies virtue—I leave that question open.

Speaking about today, I must underscore one simple fact: after nearly ten years of unjust wars, of false politics and intellectual speculations, of major crises—not only financial but ideological crises—contemporary art has not mounted any reasonable opposition. Not a single answer to the injustices of the time has appeared. And I dare say that this kind of collaboration with power is in fact in the nature of the avant-garde. The avant-garde has always declared vitality and natural power to be the main values of the world. It was the obvious influence of Nietzsche, of his aes-

thetics, which treats compassion as a weakness and attacks Christianity as an enemy of natural strength, that brought many avant-garde artists to the idea of natural, spontaneous chaos that nowadays embodies true strength. A lot of theories appeared to prove that an artist simply has to find his secret natural forces, to open up his subconscious—and this kind of natural result is far more important than any intellectual studies and searches for criteria of beauty. To recall books of Leonardo, Dürer, Hogarth, and others—there have been many efforts to find such criteria. But all of a sudden, such studies appeared to be totally useless. There was no interest anymore in a search for criteria of beauty: strong will and natural power produce beauty spontaneously! Artists were especially encouraged to work without any such reflection, because beauty will appear by itself, as a result of their spontaneous activity.

Is it surprising that such an opinion received strong and immediate approval from those who embodied the principles of power and strength? And it would be naïve to deny that those values are represented by governments and banks, by high society and armies. It is no wonder that after a revolutionary start, the avant-garde became the trusted servant of the powerful and the wealthy.

This leads us to my seventh point. The appearance of the avant-garde movement in Western society was very much connected with the meaning of “truth.” Although the word “truth” was never spoken out loud, it was clear to avant-garde artists that classical art does not represent reality and in a way misinforms us. Perhaps the word “information” is more relevant here than “truth”: new art proclaimed a new level of information about the world. From now on, it said, people would not operate with abstract ideas—on the contrary, they would receive *continual immediate reactions to events*. In a way, the avant-garde was to play the role of a chronicle, and people could expect the new generation of artists to tell them the exact truth. It is rather strange to say, but in fact, the development of avant-garde aesthetics leaves us with much less information than we had from classical art. It would be naïve to expect anything resembling news of the world from abstract art, from squares and lines, from installations and decorations. The production of decorative signs is far less informative than an old-style oil painting. Speaking about evidence of history, about details and facts of the time, we definitely may rely on paintings by Titian and Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Cézanne. In principle, we are able to reconstruct their age by viewing their works. In contrast, it

is going to be completely impossible to gain any knowledge about their age from works by Joseph Beuys or Mondrian, Marcel Duchamp or Vasarely. It is obvious that the art of these artists displays an expressive strength and shows us great will and energy, but it does not convey information. And if we return to the starting point, “lack of information means absence of truth,” we are going to be puzzled.

Point number eight. The sense of time that forms the very core of avant-garde aesthetics brings us to the next paradox. The word “actual”—in the somewhat rare sense in English of “topical” or “relevant,” relating to the present time—became indeed a sort of password for the new art. We hear today, and it has been loudly pronounced since the beginning of the past century, that the mission of art is to represent the current moment. Artists never talk today about eternity, as they used to do in the past, but rather about moments that they are able to capture. This attitude toward time appeared in modern culture with Impressionism and since then has only become more pronounced. Art, like today’s news reports, does not live a long life nowadays: it does not believe in God and has no interest in immortality. Or let us put it in a different way: art today represents a permanently young society, and it has to be always strong, masculine, and young. The feeling of progress we get from museums of contemporary art is connected to a peculiar sort of eternal youth, one of the significant effects that a contemporary artist gives to the viewer. We do not expect to see a wise old artist who reflects near his picture, not at all. Now we all require a different type of demi-urge: a young hero who never hesitates, who is able to make a radical move, to leap rather than sit. Remarkably enough, this longing for youth, this endless search for the actual, brought art to the point where the sense of time disappeared. If old age does not exist in principle, if the artist is eternally young and his proclamation must always be up to date, then no place remains for history. And indeed, we do not know the history of the avant-garde, only individual examples of young rebels. We never imagine them old. And to tell a very bitter truth, the artifacts that young rebels create (for example, shouting out loud, making brutal spots, drawing a mustache on the Mona Lisa)—all these brutal effects more or less repeat each other: they resemble one another even if a hundred years lie between them. We can all distinguish immediately the works of the old Rembrandt from those of the young Rembrandt, but who can tell simply by looking which came first, a square by Malevich or a square by Carl Andre? And here is the great paradox: in our

pursuit of moments we have lost time itself. Striving at all times for “relevance,” we fall out of history.

Point number nine. Avant-garde art is definitely very sincere, unlike classical art, which is based on rules, on established and prescribed conventions. We are witnesses to a process whereby thousands of young people rush into avant-garde art with a simple but powerful desire—*they wish to express themselves*. They are sincere in their intention to say something out loud about themselves and to let everybody hear their statement. This type of freedom appeared in art thanks to the first avant-garde artists, who were not particularly well educated but who were brave enough to teach others. The main lesson was: do whatever you can to express yourself. “How to become a poet in five lessons,” “How to write verses by cutting words from the newspaper and mixing them” (a recipe by Tristan Tzara), how to make ready-made objects, how to create spontaneous language (they advertised a new method of blind spontaneous drawing)—we know hundreds of such methods of being sincere by being ignorant and rude. It is no wonder at all that the products of such self-expression are very similar in every corner of the world. It is extremely difficult to distinguish one of these spontaneous spots or words from another, and finally we come to the point where the intention to distinguish oneself from one’s neighbor and to express one’s unique soul leads us to a situation of total identity, the total interchangeability of all expressions. One square resembles another square, and there is no way to communicate different messages through squares. And this simple fact sets a large question mark over the sincere intention of self-expression. To express something, one has to *obtain* something.

These nine points leave us very little possibility to define avant-garde in one sentence. It seems clear that the promises and the results of this artistic movement are in quite paradoxical relations. We have to reply to all these contradictions before making some final statements.



All this leads us to a key point. The catastrophe that was promised by the avant-garde *did not happen*. After temptations and tempests, the aesthetics of Western society survived with certain changes, and even created a new concept of beauty. This beauty at first pretended to be ugly, dangerous, and aggressive, but time passed, and ugly Phobos proved to

us that he, too, no less than Eros, is the son of Aphrodite. If the beauty of Phobos does not look like the beauty of Eros or the beauty of pictures depicting Eros familiar to us ever since the Renaissance, we should not complain.

Thus, we can simply take this entire episode in the history of aesthetics as a family affair, one that occurred within the family of Aphrodite. All the internal contradictions of the avant-garde can be seen as a simple description of the development of style. If we agree that the avant-garde only masqueraded as a social event but in reality was nothing but a style of art, then everything becomes very clear. Indeed, we know that there is a theory according to which each style passes through a period of radical youth, proceeds to its classical forms, and then ends with decorative elements, a sort of decadence. We can predict that the avant-garde is just a style, not a social movement, and it develops in a very usual way. We are passing now through its mannerist phase, through its decadent exhaustion. Purist in youth, ornamental in old age—we can say the same about the art of ancient Greece. And such a prediction concerning the avant-garde certainly has its grounds and may be argued by examples. Even following the fates of individual artists, we can see how they changed their habits and became decorative toward the end of their careers. This may explain to us why, after starting with purist actions, the avant-garde ended with bombastic, expensive, and insipid projects.

There could be another explanation, of course. The time of the avant-garde may be seen as one of a series of iconoclastic periods, as a contemporary attack on images that recalls the Middle Ages and the first Christians. It could well be that within Christian culture and its art history, a new period of iconoclasm began (as has happened many times during the last two thousand years). And again—as the first Christians did, and as Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux put it, in their dispute with Gothic aesthetics—avant-garde artists raised the same question in the twentieth century: Why should we bow to bright, colorful images instead of idols, what's the difference? Why should we turn from simplicity (to recall the arguments of Abelard) to huge, bombastic glorified events? We should return to the simple elements of being—that's where real truth lies! It well may be that avant-garde art—like Abelard, who found a compromise after all in his debate with Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis—reached a compromise with the capitalist world that it had been about to ruin. Slowly, the avant-garde moved to decoration, just as Christian icono-

clasm gradually came to accept the existence and the aesthetics of Gothic cathedrals. If so, this may explain to us why, starting from the point of rejecting wealth and hierarchy, the avant-garde now supports hierarchy itself. If we view avant-garde artists as another version of traditional iconoclasts, then we might even conclude that their symbols and signs are not meaningless but are linked to early Christian symbolism.

Yet there is one problem with this interpretation. We have ample evidence that many avant-garde artists were not believers at all. On the contrary, most of them hated God. The famous manifesto by Malevich, “Bog ne skinut” (“God Is Not Cast Down”), was followed by endless antireligious declarations by Lissitsky and Rodchenko, who organized public trials of paintings with religious content. Thus, in the Polytechnic Museum in Moscow, Rodchenko held a trial of Raphael’s *Marriage in Cana*, indicting the artist for a faith that did not allow freedom in art. Many of the artists of those years counted themselves equal in their significance to God or at least to the Apostles (we should recall Mayakovsky, Filonov, Dali, Yesenin, and Nolde, who named themselves apostles and prophets). Among others I would cite Goebbels, who began as a playwright and wrote a play about Jesus Christ, introducing himself as an apostle. Needless to say, this declaration had nothing to do with the moral behavior of the new apostles; however, Goebbels (who doubtless had spiritual interests) continued to seek the Holy Grail in the mountains of Tibet until the end of his life. All this was more a kind of ecstatic mixture of passions rather than belief. That age shows us not believers, but rather fanatics and hotheads. There is little doubt that they heard a certain voice from outside themselves, but there is little chance that it was the voice of God. This and many other examples give us a broad picture of agnosticism and fanatical mysticism, of pride and passion, but we can hardly find traces here of Christian belief. It was a sort of cocktail of different convictions and naïve hopes: artists were under the influence of domestic prophets such as Madame Blavatsky (as was Klee) and Gurdjieff (as was Roerich), of intellectual provocateurs such as Tristan Tzara or Marcel Duchamp, of Nostradamus (as was Modigliani) and Trotsky (as was Diego Rivera)—and almost nobody had a proper education or even had time to read books. When Paul Klee died, only one book turned up in his rooms: the book by Blavatsky that the artist had read throughout his life, and it does not appear that it brought him to belief. There is no reason to reproach artists for ignorance: the way an artist gains knowledge is different from

the scholar's way. But the fact remains that avant-garde artists did not know much about Christianity, and their activity resembles a shaman's dance more than a priest's prayer.

Of course, there were a few exceptions among the prominent figures of those years, such as Salvador Dali or Vladimir Mayakovsky (each in his own way was a true believer). However, this does not change the whole picture: we have to admit that the majority of avant-garde artists were militant atheists or mystics, and in talking about the avant-garde in general it is difficult to draw a parallel with literal, Christian iconoclasm. Instead, a clear and well-formulated opposition to Christianity itself was evident everywhere—in political discourse, in art, and in social behavior.

There may be a third way to account for the avant-garde (and I personally favor this one). It may well be that we have come to use the term "avant-garde" to describe very different events, lumping together under one name several unrelated phenomena. When we say that Chagall, Malevich, Mayakovsky, Tatlin, Picasso, Braque, Marinetti, Kandinsky, Nolde, Beckmann, and de Chirico are all avant-garde artists, we make an obvious mistake. Should we use the term "avant-garde" for the whole set of artistic movements of that age, for Surrealism and Constructivism, for Suprematism and Expressionism? Is it correct to unite all of them under the single label of "avant-garde"? As a matter of fact, we used to do so, although it is evident that Chagall has nothing to do with Malevich (they definitely had different opinions on what constitutes beauty), and Beckmann bears no resemblance to Marinetti. As with Botticelli's *La Calunnia*, it is hard to discern who embodies what in the composition. If you recall the painting, there are three female figures among others, whose features are very similar. One depicts Virtue, one depicts the Lie, and one is Jealousy. Is it not symbolic that Lie has the same features as Virtue (Beauty)? Is it not symbolic that we ourselves have to define and point out who is who in the painting? All seem to be attractive, but only one is beautiful. Only one embodies Virtue. Which one?

Where should we seek the pure element of "avant-garde" that will demonstrate the principles of the new aesthetics? It may well be that we have been using proclamations of one group of artists to assess the achievements of a totally different group. And speaking of the new meaning of beauty, we have to divide the phenomenon that we used to call the avant-garde into those artists who sought beauty, truth, and love and those who had no interest in them. Most probably, such a defi-

tion will help us account for the contradictions and paradoxes of the avant-garde.



The most popular definition of the avant-garde is new art that conflicted with the totalitarian regime. Radical and honest avant-garde artists faced brutal restrictions imposed by those in power. In this context we recall the infamous exhibition of “degenerate art” organized in 1937 in Hitler’s Germany and repressions in Stalin’s Russia; the German Bauhaus and the Soviet VkhUTEMAS (Higher State Art-Technical Studios) were closed simultaneously.

And in this respect we should also notice some rather unpopular details. It is well known that the exhibition of degenerate art was put together by the Nazis. However, it is not well known that Nazi officials were not ignoramuses in art, and some had rather refined tastes. Josef Goebbels, for instance, was a great admirer of Emil Nolde, Heinrich Himmler loved the art of Edward Munch, and Hermann Goering was a passionate collector of Impressionism. It would be an exaggeration to say that the Nazis hated art if that art represented new forms. On the contrary, the Nazis were passionate seekers of new forms. In my opinion, by organizing their exhibition of degenerate art, the leaders of the Third Reich did not oppose the principles of the avant-garde. Those who were identified as enemies of the state were condemned for making the wrong image of the age. Works by Kokoschka and Barlach, Kollwitz and Kirchner, were perceived as a kind of caricature of the time and of the “higher” Aryan race. Both the Nazi leaders and Stalin and his advisers opposed artworks with weak images, because such images did not represent the strength of their times. Such images were *wrong*, in their opinion, but they never condemned paintings that conveyed no images at all. As a matter of fact, neither Malevich nor Marinetti were included in that famous show. It is very sad to say it explicitly, but we must finally face the fact that the ideology of Nazism condemned art that was dangerous to it, that contained a certain protest. And that art was the art of Expressionism, of New Objectivity, of Surrealism and of Constructivism. It was the art of Marc Chagall and Georg Gross—but what kind of contradiction could one find between totalitarian political power and Suprematism?

Let us turn to a very significant testimonial from that age. The two volumes of memoirs written by the widow of the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam, Nadezhda Mandelstam, are a very important document of the period between 1910 and 1940. These two volumes give us a broad picture of life under the Stalinist regime, and Nadezhda, who had very sharp and clear eyes, left us all sorts of portraits and hundreds of important details. She gives us images of the opposition, of the intelligentsia, of those who hesitated and of those who struggled—we can hardly find better evidence. Curiously, she never mentions the names of avant-garde artists. Neither Malevich, nor Rodchenko, nor Lisitsky appear in her memoirs. She speaks of hundreds of artists: Larionov, Goncharova, Petrov-Vodkin, those who, in her opinion, described the age and faced and opposed the problems of the time. But there is not a single line about Malevich and the avant-garde. It is impossible not to ask why. And I think the answer is very simple: avant-garde artists, for Mandelstam and for the intelligentsia, did not describe their age or even react to it. They were themselves cosubstantial with that age. They were *themselves* the age that killed Mandelstam and drove Chagall out of Russia. (In fact, Chagall's final emigration occurred only after he lost his position in Vitebsk, when Malevich condemned him for being inadequate to contemporary challenges).

I must put this very clearly: we were witnesses to the conflict between those who still served the old criterion of beauty, like Chagall and Mandelstam, and those who embodied the new age. All those whom I name were still working within anthropomorphic aesthetics, using the human image as the measure of all things. The aesthetics of Protagoras, Plato, and Pythagoras are evidently present in their art, since the human being and the human predicament remain the plot of the story. The real avant-garde brought to the world totally different weights and measures. It was the power of the elements and superhuman forces that gave impulse to creation. And we would look in vain for human fates in the work of Malevich and Rodchenko. Needless to say, an aesthetics of the elements and signs has nothing to do with the defense of the human being. Neither Malevich (who died in 1935 and lived to witness collectivization and the exile of Trotsky) nor Marinetti, neither Rodchenko (the leader of Russian avant-garde thinkers who glorified the parades of the Soviet regime) nor Mondrian and Hans Arp, neither the Dada movement nor Salvador Dali (we should remember the remarkable essay written by George Orwell about Dali's flight from France when danger appeared)—

none of them ever opposed any regime. And that is the bitter truth. They were avant-garde artists, yes—and while using the term avant-garde it is always good to ask: *of which army?* Is it the avant-garde of the Third Reich or the avant-garde of Lorenzo il Magnifico?

Here I must say something very unpleasant which seems to me to be true: the avant-garde did not suffer through the hellish times of totalitarian regimes, but rather proclaimed itself a victim of the regime, adducing the sufferings of its neighbors as proof. The avant-garde misappropriated the sufferings of traditional art to prove its opposition to totalitarian regimes—but such opposition in reality never existed. On the contrary, the language of the avant-garde was broadly exploited by the regime; and if I say that the language of Suprematism (the very meaning of this word accords well with totalitarianism) was used for symbols of power, one should not be astonished to discover in the stars, swastikas, and old runes used by the SS not only traces of a pagan past but also links to avant-garde art. Indeed, red stars on a black ground and black swastikas on a red ground—if these remind us of anything in art history, it would be Suprematism, with its black square, black crosses, and so forth. The program that proclaimed the absence of balance, the absence of left and right, of top and bottom, of any spiritual coordinates, but identified chaos as a desirable destination—such a program could bring to life only monsters.

And indeed everything happened according to that scenario. Following well-known facts, we can see how bombastic, portentous imperial art appeared in totalitarian countries, replacing light avant-garde projects. In Germany, in Soviet Russia, in Italy, and in Spain, those who came to power and recognition had no intention of creating new forms. Quite the contrary—they returned to forgotten specimens of Egyptian and Roman architecture, of the palace style of Eastern dynasties. I am referring to the state artists and architects of the Third Reich and Stalin's Russia, to people such as Bekker, Speer, Deineka, and Iofan, who created the face of fascist and socialist Europe of the 1930s 1940s, and 1950s. We used to speak about dramatic conflict between the new imperial art and the projects of the avant-garde. However, in studying the activity of the artists of totalitarian empires, we should not forget that all of those artists were diligent students of avant-garde leaders (Deineka was the student of Rodchenko, for instance). The story of contradiction between son and father reminds us of the mythological story of Zeus, who finally killed Kronos. After all, what went wrong? If the avant-garde deliberately created

chaos, it would be only logical to expect titans to be born of that chaos. And if the avant-garde created projects, why should we not agree that the final construction proved heavier, stronger, and more bombastic than the first light draft?

Such a statement may sound rather provocative in the context of all the destruction that totalitarian regimes brought to Europe. It would be a gross exaggeration to blame brave avant-garde artists for all the disasters that mankind has endured. And it is impossible to forget the victims among the artists themselves. I only wish to underline one simple fact: the concept of beauty that we find in the ideological foundations of totalitarian regimes and of the avant-garde is *nearly the same one*. I do not say that it is an erroneous concept, but rather that it is a strong concept. And obviously it is a very tenacious one. It is neither bad nor good—these moral categories do not apply to it—but it is different from the concept of beauty inherent in the Renaissance, in the art of Middle Ages, in that kind of art that we sometimes define as Christian. Sometimes we also use the term “humanistic art” to describe the fragile image of the human being that harks back to the image of Jesus. This kind of Christian, humanistic art, the art that focuses on the existence of the individual soul and that was typified by the portrait, the novel, and the symphony—this kind of art was now replaced with something very different. It is no accident that forms of art that represented the story of the individual soul were the first to be attacked. The first thing the new art did was to disavow the painting, the novel, and the symphony—these no longer existed. And why this should be is obvious: a painting is the face of a human being, a novel is a story of an individual life, a symphony is the music of the soul. The new approach to art befitted the new society: it did not know the basic features of the Christian concept of beauty—the soul of another, compassion. It was Christian art no more: it was now pagan art. And the entire avant-garde is about the turn from Christian art back to these pagan roots.

Paul Klee once wrote of the Tree of Life that we should leave the crown and leaves and branches and penetrate down deep, to the roots of the tree. Even clearer was Velemir Khlebnikov, who said, “Perun [a pre-Christian Slavonic god] has pushed Christ furiously.” And when Odin and Thor joined forces with Perun, their efforts became very effective indeed.

It is not an exaggeration to say that it was only through turning to these native natural forces that the art of the nineteenth century could gain new vitality. At one point the avant-garde turned to the experience of native tribes in Africa and Asia, and those who sought recognition

from the sophisticated Western culture at once understood that primitive culture is much more attractive. It is particularly interesting to look at the Russian avant-garde artists who first sought recognition in the West but soon changed their orientation. Natalia Goncharova put it precisely: "Everything that happened in Western culture looks too miserable. Now I shake off the dust of Western culture from my feet and turn to the East." An even better expression was offered by Benedict Livschitz, one of the first historians of the Russian avant-garde: "The avant-garde is an archer riding in the steppe, whose face is turned to the East and looks with only half an eye back to the West." We all know about Picasso, who collected African masks, and Gauguin, who moved to Polynesia for inspiration. We remember that Ingres and Delacroix explored Eastern culture in order to enrich their own: *The Turkish Bath* and *The Lion Hunt in Morocco* probably represent the same turn to the East that we observe in the twentieth century. However, in studying the Western habit of seeking colorful details in the East, we should say that the exploration of the East in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries recalls the process of colonization, and what happened in the twentieth century is similar to the process of decolonization. The goal was lost, and it was a primitive tribe that conquered Christian culture—in order to infuse it with new vitality.

It seems obvious that avant-garde art, avant-garde politics, and avant-garde conscience are nothing more than paganism's revenge upon Christianity. And in saying this, I do not want simply to say that paganism is necessarily bad—on the contrary. Paganism brought to the world most impressive cultures and works of art. In contemplating great and stunning examples of the art of Babylon and Syria, Mesopotamia and Egypt, we might ask ourselves how such great and impressive art could ever have been succeeded by the aesthetics of Christian culture. Competition between the little icon and the great column, between the image of a frail, suffering man and that of a glorious king made from marble and granite, would seem to be absurd. It seems a miracle that Christian art won out in some parts of our world. And it would be no surprise if today great pagan art were to reclaim its former position.



In summarizing all of the above, let me make a rather self-evident statement that may help to describe the new type of beauty that has now been introduced to society. It seems that the aesthetics of the avant-garde helped

us to take a significant step and to make a decision that Western aesthetics had been unable to make for centuries. We had been hesitating between the powerful and strong pagan past and a tender and spiritual Christianity. Several times it seemed that a balance had been struck, but no such balance ever held. We can be proud (although it is a strange pride) to represent the generation that appears to have been able to make a final decision. In our time, Western civilization, which is still called Christian, shifted from the Christian criteria of beauty to the pagan ones. The difference between the two lies in a fundamental point: the existence of *the image*. Christian art deals with the image and embodies all its sense in the image, whereas in the new aesthetics the image was replaced by the symbol.

This was not something unexpected or even dramatic. For centuries, the *civilization* that calls itself Christian, on the one hand, and *Christian culture*, on the other, have not been really identical, and whether they really ever were remains a big question. An image that is the main characteristic of European Christian culture became an important component of civilization for a very short historical period, and it is small wonder that it has become less important now as society moves from religion, from obligations, from church, to secularism. All that we call the “cult of Our Lady,” “belief in the beauty of virtue,” the “image that overcomes death”—all these things existed for only a very short time in the history of mankind and even in the history of Europe.

It should be viewed only as a miracle that at a certain point people thought that they needed this very special type of spiritual beauty, not muscles and power but tender, defenseless truth (please keep in mind the painting by Botticelli). It is a great miracle that the fragile image was able for any time at all to compete with gigantic pyramids and colossal statues. It is a miracle that, for a time, the fragile image became stronger than Babylonian lions and Egyptian sphinxes, than the kings of Assyria and all their nameless warriors and slaves. It was a miracle, and we have to be grateful to God that, for more than a thousand years, we developed an aesthetics in our culture that defended this fragile image and its right to exist. Portraits and personal stories, novels and symphonies—all these appeared out of a simple fact, the existence of a fragile image that opposes impersonal power.

Having said this, we should not be surprised that civilization will take its revenge. Problems of demography and of the spread of democracy, the need to control the lands of one’s neighbors and to conquer

distant lands—all this together leads us to a significant turn in our aesthetics. We face ecological and demographic problems that will not be easy to solve. How the world is going to feed its hungry, how the world will protect itself from catastrophe, depends on whether it possesses the language to discuss its problems. To refine such a language that will serve for communication throughout the whole inhabited world, we may have to agree that such a language can no longer be personal, but for objective reasons must be impersonal. Were not impersonal, common criteria what all the regimes of the twentieth century were seeking?

It is clear that we need a common universal language, a language suitable for commands and orders, for communication within this new global world. The very practical aim of such a language is that orders should be effectively received by African tribes and Slavic tribes, by Balkan nations and by Latin American peasants—and such orders simply cannot be personal messages. In the developing world, dictators and leaders no longer need portraits and novels: they need a system of signs and simple constructions. They need belief in the elements, not in God. Through the twentieth century, dictators and democrats, leaders of society and artists, philosophers and prophets were seeking such an interdisciplinary language, a common international dialect. And the avant-garde was a significant step in this search. The second wave of the avant-garde (the so-called second avant-garde, although this formulation sounds rather droll) shows us that this process is coming to an end: the ideals of a new aesthetics and the principles of a new language have already been built. And most important of all—now we have our new criteria for beauty.

The search for impersonal criteria of beauty has been the main strategic goal of social development since the Middle Ages. We can call this search “mainstream,” although there are many other names, such as “radical,” “actual,” “progressive,” “shocking.” All of these are surrogates for the name of Phobos—the opposition to Eros, the god of impersonal feelings. And the search for the taste of this strange god was the main goal of the century. Some seek it with a clear conscience, in full awareness of what they are seeking. Some seek it spontaneously. Some have sought it in order to follow a trend, others for fear of being left outside the so called mainstream. Phobos, moreover, is a god that embodies itself not in portraits but in signs. And indeed, we do not have portraits in our time (as we know, the art of portraiture has nearly disappeared), but we have very impressive and powerful signs.

There is a special attraction in the vitality of signs, because the sign (unlike the image) is immortal. The image—if we keep in mind that the image of Christ is the key example—is something that lives its life and can overcome death but only at a certain price. The sign is something that may be turned in any direction, and that may not have any special meaning. It may serve the poor and the rich, the red and the brown, the utopia and the tradition, the old world and the new order. The sign makes for easy control over the crowd. The sign is something that denies the existence of individuality and therefore denies any necessity of harmony—or better, it embodies a new harmony.

This kind of new pagan art represents Western culture today, and I fervently hope that this state of affairs will prove temporary. Today, we have to ask ourselves: What is Christian art without the image? And if there is no Christian art anymore—what is Christian civilization without Christian art?

The challenge of our times will set new tasks before Christian civilization, and we are witnesses of how that is happening today. I have a strong hope of a new Renaissance. My hope is based on the fact that our civilization has passed through such periods a few times already—and pagan art has been transformed into Christian images. The material of present-day history, the experience of our days, our hesitations, and our searches will be composed and shaped into the real portrait of time, into the image of faith and hope. We will not have long to wait until Eros will be relevant again and the power of Phobos will recede. To call for that, to call for a return of meaning to art and to the Christian image, is the main task of the present time. If Christian civilization can meet that challenge, it will survive in the new century. And if any change for the better is possible in the coming period, it will come only through a new search for harmony, only through the victory of Eros, and only through an immortal beauty that cleanses souls and warms hearts.