

# **Artful Gods: Aesthetics and Politics in the Age of Technology**

by

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## **Abstract**

This paper is an investigation into the common claim that modern politics is imagery. My approach is both phenomenological and historical, meaning that I first establish what conditions had to pertain in order for modern society to exist as such, and that I then illustrate how those conditions come to be realized via the actions of the past. I conclude that public authority no longer rests in the hands of the governmental, economic, or ecclesiastical spheres, but it is rather something that emerges from a crux between the arts and sciences; the spirit of the digital age is neither labourer nor consumer, but that of the aesthete.

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# 1 Introduction

This thesis argues that we are on the cusp of a new politic based on principles of aesthetic rather than those of labour, consumption, or technology. But a politic of images should not be taken as a mere symptom, and must rather be confronted as something meaningful in its own right; it is in their arts and preeminent mediums that a culture represents itself, and the works of art are an embodied development of significance and identity. Indeed, the oft-iterated spiritual crisis of modernity is something whose reconciliation required the proliferation of the arts, and in this search for meaning it is the prerogatives of aesthetic that comes to be the basis for public authority in a technologically-enabled modern society. Ultimately, I hope to show that we are a society whose spirit is *in utero*, and that our nascent transition is made clear in the aesthetics of our politic.

## 1.1 Scope and Method

My methods are both phenomenological and historical. As such, I observe the overarching concepts and conditions structuring public discourse, as well as the underlying practises and events by which our society has come to exist in the form that it has and not otherwise. In making these arguments I will provide working definitions of my basic terms. In addition to these, I provide a discussion on the principles of art, as well as a brief overview of those periods that contributed most intensely to their realization. Likewise, in treating modernity I will necessarily need to provide an account of its origins. The historical scope must therefore include Greece, Italy, Western Europe, the UK, and North America. But in my discussion of contemporary works and events I will largely confine myself to North America and the UK, in the interests of both brevity and relevance.

I hope that my methods will speak for themselves, but will here make a preliminary note

concerning my selection of sources. Throughout this thesis I will be using the terms of aesthetic, history, spirit, and crisis: in all cases my understanding of those concepts is drawn from Hegel and Kojève. The reasons for this will be made clearer over the next several pages, so that a few explanatory words here should suffice. Hegel's conception of the human mind is one that provides a common foundation from which to better grasp the relations of aesthetics, philosophy, and human activity. And Kojève's elaboration of the End of History, while certainly provocative, is nevertheless a comprehensive account of the principles that have governed the growth of Western civilization for at least the past four centuries. Both writers are invaluable to knowing modernity.

But in accounting for the practises by which these principles were realized I turn to other writers, most especially Arendt, whose elaboration of the *vita activa* is vital to this thesis. I freely admit that descriptive clarity is an albatross around the necks of both Hegel and Kojève, and it is rarely the case that Hegelian concepts are made clearer through the employment of Hegelian language. Further, there are any number of particular details that are abbreviated or neglected in their accounts. But while I have incorporated writers who may be considered non- or even anti-Hegelian, I do not think this should be problematic. There is a marked chronological correspondence among narratives, and I do not believe that there are any essential conflicts between the phenomena described and the claims made by my thesis. Finally, my intent here is not to prove or disprove any single writer, including either Hegel or Kojève. Rather, I hope to both develop and challenge existing conceptions of aesthetics as this relates to the spirit of our time, and it is my belief that this can only be accomplished via careful mediation of sources. Truth is multi-faceted; its pursuit must include a mutliplicity of narratives, many of which may appear to be in conflict until their final resolution.

## 2 The Progress of Reason and The End of History

Any philosophic enquiry must begin with a consideration of ends, and for that reason I would like to begin our narrative with an account of Hegel's conception of history. This of course necessitates that we speak of history as a progression towards an end, a reading of Hegel that is best corroborated by Alexandre Kojève. This approach is advantageous because Kojève does not simply provide us with an exegesis of Hegel's system of thought, he also extrapolates from that system and provides a more comprehensive elaboration of its essential character and necessary implications. Additionally, Kojève's interpretations take into consideration the fact that Hegel was able to conceive of his system at all,<sup>1</sup> thereby subjecting Hegel to the very same phenomenological model he had developed for his own observation of history. Consequently, it is fair to say that Kojève's reading of Hegel begins with the three inferences he draws regarding Hegel himself.

Kojève asserts that in order for Hegel to have written the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, three things had to be true. Firstly, Hegel had to inhabit a world in which humankind *perceived* itself as being both free and historical, meaning that we had to perceive ourselves as being endowed with a desire for autonomy and that we had to experience the passage of time in an intelligible manner. Secondly, Hegel had to have described the conditions that lead to a world where we *could* perceive ourselves as free and historical. Thirdly, Hegel had to have determined what Being itself had to be in order for that perception to have become a *reality*. Hegel's answer to all three levels of consideration was the two-fold assertion that Being is coeval with Reason, and that Reason is developed in history, or as Time.<sup>2</sup> Put otherwise, humankind is free and historical because we possess reason; possessing reason, humankind is impelled to the progressive realization of freedom.

In its efforts to understand the world, reason is necessarily driven towards the development

and understanding of itself.<sup>3</sup> This in turn requires that reason be liberated from the impediments of accident and ignorance, meaning that reason seeks freedom from its limitations. Freedom is here meant both physically and politically. Physical freedom refers to a freedom of mobility as well as to a freedom from want, while political freedom is freedom from the arbitrary wills of others.<sup>4</sup> As such, autonomy is something to be evaluated in terms of both individual allowance and political obligation, and it is therefore something whose progressive development or lack thereof can be measured. We call the account of that development History, as it is recorded and communicated in publicly known speeches and deeds. History is an account of the progress of reason and freedom via political action.<sup>5</sup>

The least developed form of freedom in this regard is that of arbitrary freedom,<sup>6</sup> or the freedom to do as one feels. This is the freedom to follow one's arbitrary will, and as such it proceeds from the assumption that one's own subjective experiences are the basis of absolute identity, or truth. While this freedom is often what is meant by use of the term, it is an especially impoverished form of freedom with regards to the betterment of reason. When the pursuit for knowledge thinks to look no further than the perceptions of the subject, it fails to seek those objective conditions or law-like generalizations governing phenomena.<sup>7</sup> As such, the arbitrary will creates for itself a one-sided account of a phenomenon as a thought-object, one that is wholly divorced from the thing itself. The thought-object in turn acquires an identity that is at least partly derived from the subject's own, while its objective properties are neglected. The arbitrary will finds itself at the mercy of nature, for every objective stimulus whose origin lies unseen is assigned an intention: natural phenomenon are explained by a mytho-magical<sup>8</sup> or a Heroic<sup>9</sup> causality, and entire pantheons are drawn from the mind's idealization of its particular circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

Obverse to the arbitrary freedom of the arbitrary will is the active nihilism of the abstract

will. Here, the subject does not express themselves in the object, but rather focuses on the objective at cost to subjective determinacy; not being able to see the causes of its own Self, the abstract will never reaches a formal decision concerning itself. As such, an extremity of abstract will lacks fixed purpose or identity. Lacking terms by which to recognize its own impulses, this aspect of the will can only pursue its own freedom through the *negation* of anything that is seen as an opposition to a will it cannot describe. Manifested in an individual or as the ethos of a people, the abstract will is expressed in the “fury of destruction”<sup>11</sup> such as that seen in the initial stages of the French Revolution, or in the “freedom of the void”<sup>12</sup> so studiously pursued by iconoclasts and fanatics.<sup>13</sup>

But we should not understand the fury of destruction to be limited to either religion or politics, and we can note that scientists and bureaucrats have also indulged in the nihilistic urge. Where an extremity of subjective reasoning creates idealism, this opposed extremity of objective reasoning is found in various expressions of radical positivism. Systems of thought that only emphasize the objective find themselves committed to providing an account of the sensible world through an endless itemization of reality. The ongoing research so common to modern labs provides an example: whatever knowledge might be gained from any discovery of genuine import soon finds itself proven repeatedly and *ad nauseum*. An encyclopedic accumulation of data is confused for the acquisition of further understanding.<sup>14</sup>

To sum, the arbitrariness of subjective reasoning creates an idealism, a sleeping of the mind where desires are drawn forth and given free rein. Yet what the idealists “in fact receive, and bring to birth in their sleep, is nothing but dreams.”<sup>15</sup> And strictly objective reasoning seeks to negate all constraints it perceives to an identity it cannot describe.<sup>16</sup> Objective phenomena are perceived by the senses, given an identity that is understood by the mind, and can therefore be described to others; yet sensations are myriad rather than singular, the imputation of identity is an intangible

process, and representations are *not* the things being presented. Consequently, the development of reason, and therefore of freedom, must recognize the existence of both subject and object as each appears in their mutual identification of the other.<sup>17</sup> The will that grasps this establishes a foundation from which to grasp the essence, form, and content of a thing as a reified whole. This development is fittingly referred to as the concrete will.

When the concrete will is made absolute in the willing reciprocity of rights and duties between citizen and government, the resulting development is described by Hegel as the ethical state.<sup>18</sup> It can be understood as a totality created by the interactions of two separate yet interdependent processes. It is made possible by, firstly, an understanding that the liberation of humankind from the laws of nature requires that natural laws be subordinated to the human will. Secondly, that the greatest degree of individual autonomy for the greatest number of people requires that human-made laws be used to control or negate our natural impulses. The establishment of the ethical state can only occur once laws have been ratified in public institutions and enshrined in a constitution. The objectivity of the laws serves to structure and guide the subjective wills of the people, just as their individual practises come to provide the form and the spirit of the laws. The continued spiritual development of a culture or civilization thus requires a certain degree of material comfort, whether this be purchased through the slavery of others, the imposition of class structuring, or through the proliferation of innovative technologies. Of these, it is only the last that can fulfil the roles necessary for the implementation of universal human rights.

But if history is the progress of freedom, then history can also be characterized as a struggle for recognition. This is of course to refer to the well-known Master-Slave dialectic. Put briefly, two self-conscious individuals meet each other. Each desires to be recognized as more than an object in the eyes of the other; each wants to be recognized as a unique individual and a fully

human being. They struggle, and the one who is prepared to die for this recognition becomes the master. The one who fears death submits and becomes the slave. Masters use the labour of slaves to reify their wills on earth, and to create public works in which their struggle for recognition is realized. The words and deeds of the master are only made known to others owing to the world of public works created by the slaves.

In time, masters grow dissatisfied with the recognition of their slaves, for the slaves are mere instruments. The master therefore seeks the recognition of other masters. This is done via public competition and armed conflict. It is the slaves who rebuild, just as it was the slaves who built the world of the master in the first place. Thus, through obedience and imitation, slaves are the effective creators of the human world,<sup>19</sup> and they are likewise its inheritors. Over time, the slaves mitigate the powers of the masters while simultaneously increasing their recognition of each other until such time as political autonomy is extended over all known peoples: serfs become servants, slaves become citizens, and the controlling urges of would-be masters are sublimated into society or emasculated by law. Western history comes to be an increasing recognition of freedom via political action and the progress of reason.

## **2.1 The Universal Homogenous State**

The logical culmination of historical progress is the establishment of universal laws recognizing the political rights and duties of all autonomous individual beings. History ends with the realization of a global civilization enshrining human rights within a lawful constitution; its arrival is coincident with the provision of a quality of life ensuring that all individuals are freed from basic material needs. This is the Universal Homogenous State (UHS), and it is impossible that it could exist without the thorough implementation of technology on all levels,<sup>20</sup> whether this be in

terms of simple material resources or varying forms of political and social regulation. The UHS is predicated on the realization of individual autonomy through the gratification of personal impulses via publicly regulated technologies.

The individual of such a state is said by Kojève to be akin to a god at play.<sup>21</sup> Freed in general from anything resembling the crushing labours of his forebears, the citizens of the UHS are able to pursue ends of their own devising while employing technologies that permit them to alter their environment as surely as could any master of old. Conversely, Kojève points out that if history is marked by the progress of human spirit as realized in the works of human hands, and if that spirit was completed with the advocacy of universal human rights recognizing all individuals, then our existence can no longer be described as distinctly human. Subsequently, the gods at play are also described by Kojève as reanimalized men,<sup>22</sup> a sort of Elysian shade suspended between complacency and transcendence. We are, in a sense, totem-beasts, who have been granted a garden of marvels but are long since deprived of the ability to wonder.

It is evident that both writers are describing something very much like our own liberal-democracy. And while their accounts may smack of hubris, we can also see that at a basic material level it is undeniably true that history has seen a gradual improvement in the standards of living of Western populations. Whether measured in terms of longevity, infant mortality, access to food and water, etc., modern society enjoys an indisputable advantage when compared to its predecessors. And while there exist a number of people who would deny that the spread of technology benefits less developed nations, I would suggest that such claims are only rarely agreed with by the same states that these Luddites claim to protect. C.P. Snow writes on this facet of the problem quite eloquently, and for that reason I here produce his summary of the conflict:

"It is all very well for us, sitting pretty, to think that material standards of living don't matter all that much. It is all very well for one, as a personal choice, to reject industrialisation ... and if you go without much food, see most of your children die in infancy, despise the comforts of literacy, accept twenty years off your own life, then I respect you for the strength of your aesthetic revulsion. But I don't respect you in the slightest if, even passively, you try to impose the same choice on others who are not free to choose. In fact, we know what their choice would be. For, with singular unanimity, in any country where they have had the chance, the poor have walked off the land into the factories as fast as the factories could take them."<sup>23</sup>

So much for an account of material progress. It is of course much harder to argue in terms of the progress of *reason* without succumbing to the charges of hubris already established. But it is worth noting that to possess the concern and self-awareness of even the possibility of such hubris might itself be taken as proof of a certain kind of progressive rationality. Likewise, in terms of individual autonomies vis-a-vis the machinations of the state it must also be seen that modern society enjoys rights not found at other points of history. The point I am making here is this: whether one accepts their teleological accounts of history or not, it is undeniably the case that Hegel and Kojève describe the principles of an end-state that is exactly co-terminous with those of any technology-driven modern consumer society. It does not matter whether one believes that history ended on such-and-such a date, or whether or not it may be immanent. What does matter is that whether the UHS is achieved in practise or not is incidental to the fact that its *principles* have already been established, and that these same principles have effectively shaped political and social realities around the globe for at least several centuries. As long as the development of reason is held to be synonymous with individual autonomy, so will Hegel and Kojève continue to prove vital for any account of the human condition.

This is then the context in which my analysis is to unfold, and the fittedness of the principles of the UHS to our own society can hardly be disputed. It is difficult to see how anything resembling traditional accounts of politics could take place in the UHS unless it were to take the form of conflicts among individually chosen sub-cultures, or to say the same thing, between collectivities that have practised their right to arbitrarily determine the identity they wish to belong to. And of course, this is what has happened.

The subordination of the master's will to the concrete laws of the state ensure that every individual has rights to universal recognition, while simultaneously ensuring the performance of those duties that are necessary for the maintenance and preservation of the state. But at the same time, such a code ameliorates the conditions for politics insofar as there is little conflict over principles: the citizens of the ethical state are in agreement concerning the principles under which they wish to live, but differ mainly in their inability to agree on practises. Thus, our nomenclature has retained the language of left and right spectrums, but liberals and conservatives alike tend towards the centre. In either case, majority parties are invested in the fuller realization of responsible autonomy, and both employ the same terms of progress.

The malaise so common to modern states is a direct result of their having tied reason and freedom together under the auspices of a liberal-democratic constitution. This is because while recognition is now universal, it is also abstract,<sup>24</sup> and it is incumbent on individuals to make such recognition personal, substantial, and concrete. The satisfaction that came with the fulfilment of identity or community roles cannot be taken for granted in a society that expects all individuals to choose those roles rather than suffer their imposition. Likewise, government is no longer seen as a vehicle for transformation, but rather becomes a caretaker system and a mechanism that responds to societal stimulus. Public authority gradually ceases to rest in our governmental institutions, and the

legislation passed by government is frequently the reflection of decisions reached via societal means rather than motive forces being articulated by political agents.

It is easy enough to see how the principles of the UHS would lead to the state of affairs just described. What remains to be seen is how this occurred, or how it was that the political and public spheres that comprise such a large part of Western history were to be changed from agency and action to reflex and image. Similarly, we have yet to explore the curious dichotomy of the modern arts: while public figures are increasingly reliant on the works of artists and the societal negotiation of individual aesthetic choices, modern art itself is often treated as something confusing, irrelevant, or just plain foolish. Yet art, and excellent art at that, is more prevalent than ever before, and the person who mocks the gallery is as likely to be a connoisseur of film. It is with these questions and lines of development in mind that I now turn to a provision of the operating terms and definitions to be used throughout this paper, following which we will finally be able to engage with the identification and purposes of art.

## **2.2 The Political**

The political is to be found, as Carl Schmitt suggests, in any “specific entity of a people,” comprising “the ultimate authority”<sup>25</sup> in terms of public decision-making. As such, the essence of the political must also involve the demarcation of identity as well as an understanding of what *ought* to be versus what *should not* be, or to make the friend-enemy distinction.<sup>26</sup> Now, politics is not an independent sphere, and it is not at liberty to affect such distinctions without deriving them from other criteria. Thus, politics informs its distinctions by drawing on the evaluative criteria of independent spheres such as morals, aesthetics, and so on: in the moral sphere, an ally would be synonymous with “good,” while the enemy is “bad,” etc.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Schmitt argues that any sphere

affecting such an existential distinction must necessarily become political once it pursues its own tenets to their logical end.<sup>28</sup> In aesthetics, the distinction between “beautiful” and “ugly” becomes political when one group of artists and another fail to agree on their mutual definitions, or in the moral spheres when one group and another fail to agree on what is “good” and “evil.”

It is for this reason that Schmidt tells us that the political must involve the *possibility* of conflict or death between collectivities prepared to fight for themselves and their shared interests.<sup>29</sup> The political sphere is one that inculcates and directs cultural prerogatives via the concepts and institutions that are believed to hold ultimate authority, and similarly affects action against existential deterrents. This means that the forms of the political must be of such a kind that they can unite people while simultaneously identifying the structures of authority. Politics requires a public space and common forums in which people can speak, act, and interact.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, the political is not to be understood as a symbol or metaphor, but as a living, breathing reality occupying intelligible environments and capable of being made known to others.

Public authority thus finds its animating principles in the prerogatives of a people and is made into formal reality via those institutions and modes of discourse that a people find to be appropriate to those prerogatives. Authority figures are those figures or structures whose ability to govern, or to determine the status quo and the daily concerns of the populace, is taken as granted by the people being governed. There is of course a great deal of variety in the types of authority claims people have accepted throughout history, but whether found in a monarchy, a republic, or a democracy, the form of the political are those persons and institutions that the people allow and expect to establish a status quo; similarly, public authority is also seen in those persons and institutions that are allowed and expected to define, declare, and enforce states of emergency, or

I It is synonymous with Arendt's description of action in the public sphere. For more details, see Section 2.5 "The Vita Activa and the Arts as Worldly Objects," presented later in this paper.

who otherwise define what qualifies as an exception to the norm.

### 2.3 Spirit

We have already seen a description of what is meant by use of the term spirit, but as an elaboration of the concept, as well as some clarification as to why I insist on using this often controversial term, I here offer the definition given by Darrin Barney in *The Network Society*: “A spirit is a vital or animating principle: in the enchanted vocabulary of the ancient faiths, spirit comports with the soul and is ageless; in the enlightened vocabulary of modern science, the term spirit names a motive force particular in time and place.”<sup>30</sup> With some minor explanation this definition suits our immediate concerns, and it will be showed to be appropriate to later discussion.

In describing the spirit as an animating principle, we mean to refer to those concepts or ideas that motivate our interactions with the world, as well as the interpretative structures by which those interactions are understood. Further, such interactions must be considered as temporal, as it is only by reference to the passage of time that anything can be said to have occurred at all.<sup>31</sup> To refer to the spirit of a thing is then to refer to both the understanding of the subject as well as the specific details of the object as these are developed over time.<sup>32</sup> Herein lies the substance of a thing. A substantial understanding of a phenomenon is one that seeks to know all the conditions that must pertain in order for the thing to exist as such and not otherwise. Hegel provides an example by way of a tree: a tree is an object, but it requires sun, soil, roots, and many other conditions enabling it to germinate, grow, and die. Growth and decay are temporal processes, and the negation of time is as much a part of the tree's substance as are the material components<sup>33</sup> permitting it to exist. Further, the comprehension of the tree as this total entity requires the presence of a subject who is capable of self-reflection such that it recognizes this process of cognition while it occurs.<sup>34</sup>

The truth revealed here *is* the spirit. It springs forth from the consideration of the substance of a thing as this is determined by its essential principles, defined by its formal causes, and described in the contents of a particular manifestation. The truth occurs as a system, and the substance of history is shown to be coeval with the thoughts and deeds of man.<sup>35</sup> To refer to the spirit of a person is to describe them in terms of their essential characters as well as the circumstances and conditions that contributed to that formation. Likewise, to refer to the spirit of a people is to refer to an identity forged from their shared beliefs, norms, and laws, as these are developed and reified through known events.<sup>36</sup> It is thus perfectly correct to speak of the spirit as being both ageless and particular, for the spirit is something essential to humankind, yet emerges from specific and known histories.

Spirit offers something over and above the distal abstractions of science or the platitudes of idealism. It is not some cold, dead thing to be dissected and catalogued, nor is it intended to be a pleasing spectacle, but it is rather the concept of a thing as comprehended in the fullest vitality of its existence. At the same time, the term spirit must be understood as something that is emphatically anthropocentric.<sup>37</sup> To apprehend the spirit requires an account of the object as it is identified by a knowing subject; non-human nature produces no such subject, nor do non-human entities seek, observe, or articulate their spirit. Subsequently, in a search for the spirit of a thing, we begin with an account of its conditions of being as these are related to the perceptions and understanding of the human mind. And this is all the more true when we are searching for the spirit of a people.

#### **2.4 The Overarching Metaphor and our Underlying Concerns**

Enquiry into the spirit of a people or a time must then start with an observation of its

practical realities, as well as the paradigms within which those practises are interpreted and made sense of. Put otherwise, an account of the spirit may arise from an account of the underlying concerns and Overarching Metaphors governing the common experiences of the people in question. By underlying concerns I mean the “ground of raw experience,”<sup>38</sup> or those particular activities and experiences perceived as being important to, or at least consistent with, our everyday lives. The Overarching Metaphor is described by Darby as being “an expression of the shared perceptions and practises of a people living in a particular *Age*,”<sup>39</sup> where an age is a period of time characterized by specific systems of knowing by which events are recognized and evaluated. Thus, the Overarching Metaphor is a presupposed structure of symbols and narrative by which people of an age are able to interpret their experiences as well as communicate the significance of the same to others.

## 2.5 Spiritual Crisis

Spiritual crisis occurs “when our shared or *overarching metaphor* becomes uprooted from our shared *underlying concerns*,”<sup>40</sup> or when the structures and concepts by which we make sense of our place in the world ceases to hold any personal meaning. Put otherwise, it is a time when our daily activities are no longer believed to have any purpose. It is characterized most clearly in the abandonment or mistrust of public authority, for it is precisely this aspect of communal values that is under siege during a spiritual crisis. Two well known writers of crisis in the Western canon are Plato and St. Augustine, both of whom sought to address the crises of their own times; in our narrative of spiritual development we shall then have cause to refer to the times of both. And, seeing it here described, it is likely apparent to the reader that modernity has seemed to be plagued by spiritual crisis since its onset. Indeed, in light of how consistently such crisis seems to vex us moderns, one wonders whether it is possible that Hegel's end of history is in fact a perpetual twilight of purpose. But we shall come back to this point when appropriate.

## 2.6 Aesthetics

In the modern parlance, the term “aesthetics” is most commonly used to refer to an experience possessing a distinctly sensual character. It is also used to refer to one's preferences of taste. Neither definition is wholly wrong, and they make readily apparent what the relationship between aesthetics and the arts are: the arts are the objects in which the aesthetic is formed, developed, and apprehended by others.<sup>41</sup> But this description does not go very far in defining the terms of study, nor does it adequately explain why a philosopher should consider aesthetics to be a worthy field of observation in itself. To be more specific, aesthetics is a study of those works whose form and content is such that what is represented to the senses *transcends* mere sensuality.<sup>42</sup> Thus, aesthetics is concerned with principles of genuine beauty, grace, or wonder; conversely, aesthetics must also identify the ugly, the vicious, and the terrible. Hegel describes the beautiful, or the ideal, as being the essential concept underlying all aesthetic enquiry, and art is to be evaluated according to its fulfillment of this end. The beautiful occurs when the significance inherent to a work is substantiated by its execution, or when the inner significance is given proper expression in an external form and content.<sup>43</sup> Aesthetics is then the study of truth as represented to the senses by a work or object; it emphasizes that, above all else, “appearance itself is essential to essence. Truth would not be truth if it did not show itself.”<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, I am in agreement with Hegel that in referring to the aesthetic we cannot mean to indicate the beauties of nature or natural environment.<sup>45</sup> As with the understanding of spirit, the contemplation of aesthetics is thoroughly anthropocentric, and it should proceed from an observation of works that are produced or shaped by human hands. The aesthetic significance of an environment can only be found in the thoughts of a human mind. Non-human nature does not

II More will be said on this in Section 2.7 of this paper.

ascribe meaning to itself, or if it does we have yet to be made aware of it. The qualification of beauty is an attribution of the human mind,<sup>46</sup> just as any description of the same must proceed from human discourse. And so we might well admit a painting of, or an ode to, a mountain range in our observations of the beautiful, but we would be misguided in our efforts if we instead just described the terrain as something coeval with the arts. The objects of study for aesthetics are individual works of art,<sup>III</sup> while its scope is that entire range of concepts whose representation is considered to be worthy of appreciation.

### **3 The Work of Art**

The definition of art is one of the more controversial exercises a writer might attempt. Indeed, I have often encountered greater difficulties amongst my contemporaries when trying to identify art than I have in describing politics or religion. Attendant to the historical difficulties associated with this identification is the contemporary tendency to treat the arts as frivolous and subjective. For these reasons I offer a discussion of art to collaborate my own definition so that the reader might be better able to more fully understand the nature and significance of the work of art. I would like to begin that discussion by arguing what art cannot be before defining what it is. I thereby hope to address some preconceptions the reader may have regarding this matter. And while there are myriad opinions on the identity and role of art, I believe that the more common alternatives can be reduced to three essential positions. These are here identified as the sentimental, formal, and inspirational theories, of which the most popular in contemporary society is likely the first. It will be noticed that at least two of these alternatives are polarized, but this is hardly surprising since the arts are themselves often polarizing. At any rate, the extremity between positions provides us with an advantage in terms of demonstrative clarity.

III It would be fair to say that art is of aesthetics in the same manner that theology is of religion and logic is of philosophy. In all cases, the practises are both defined by, and definitive of, the discipline in question.

### 3.1 Via Negativa I: Art as Sentiment

The sentimental interpretation of art holds that we call art simply that which we prefer. What "is enjoyed is not so much the work of art, as the occasioned experience or state of mind,"<sup>47</sup> and the value of art is believed to lie in its capacity for entertainment or emotional gratification.<sup>48</sup> David Hume offers a particularly comprehensive argument in favour of this position, arguing that what we call good or beautiful is only that which agrees with our tastes, and that tastes cannot be considered as right, wrong, true, or false. Aesthetics is then a matter of sentiment or opinion, and any evaluation of a work of art is based on preference rather than the objective qualities of the work in question. But Hume also argues that some sentiments may be so wildly misplaced as to effectively refute the judgement in question. The example he provides is that of a person who prefers the works of Ogilby over Milton. In such a case, Hume states that "no one pays attention to such a taste, and we don't hesitate to say that the sentiment of these purported critics is absurd and ridiculous."<sup>49</sup> Thus does Hume introduce the standard of taste, a standard that is vital to his understanding of both the arts and of morality.

Hume in fact attributes much of the "seeming harmony in morals"<sup>50</sup> seen among cultures and throughout history to our faculty of taste: the apparent unanimity of virtues across philosophic systems is, at least in part, drawn from the nature of language rather than any allegedly timeless ethical precepts. Further, while admitting that "people can prefer the oddest things,"<sup>51</sup> Hume proposes that there is nevertheless a shared standard, or a commonality of tastes by which a majority of people can form a consensus of sentiment concerning a work or deed. This shared standard arises from the natural structures of the human mind, and an ability to exercise good taste is equated to the healthy functioning of the organs.<sup>52</sup> This consensus is not an indiscriminate one

however, and Hume argues that in any given field there will be "true critics,"<sup>53</sup> identified by their "[s]trong sense, united to delicate sentiment, improved by practice, perfected by comparison, and cleared of all prejudice."<sup>54</sup> The true critic is expected to overcome prejudices of personal preference and cultural prerogatives in order to take into account the propriety of the medium<sup>55</sup> being used and the meaning portrayed. Such critics are few and far between however, and for Hume the final arbiter of good taste appears to be history itself.

On the one hand, this view of art holds a certain appeal insofar as it reduces the complexities of art to a parsimonious calculation of personal satisfaction. On the other hand, the paradoxical demands Hume is forced to make on his standard of taste are telling: while holding that an evaluation of beauty is one of sentiment, and that sentiments cannot be wrong, Hume also wants us to accept that there are standards governing the perception of beauty by which a bad critic could be made to admit his judgement is in error.<sup>56</sup> The apparent resolution to this problem resides in delicacy of taste, or the degree of minuteness to which someone develops a given faculty,<sup>57</sup> but in describing sensual or cognitive structures universal to the human mind, Hume tacitly admits at least one very real foundation on which to found the construction of an objective standard of evaluation. Put otherwise, if taste can be held to standards that are in turn derived from the cognitive structures universal to the human organism, then the identification of those same structures would establish a framework for the evaluation of art that could be universal to all human minds.

One might respond that Hume's emphasis on standards of taste make him a poor representative of the sentimental view, but the sentimental approach is injured by any attempt to move away from him. Firstly, if a proponent seeks to disregard all notions of superior quality among artworks, then it is questionable whether the sentimental view can provide an account for why people would bother engaging in high art in the first place: if the only thing we seek in art is

entertainment, then there is no real reason why one should bother reading classic literature. The classics can of course entertain, but an appeal to novelty alone is inadequate in explaining their longevity or their continued significance. What we find in a Shakespearean drama or one of Poe's tales is something that is both different than, and superior to, the kind of sensations we seek out when merely passing the time. And even when observed with a view to pleasure, these works of art demand of their audiences a level of engagement that is at once deeper and more strenuous than the more frivolous works commonly associated with popular media.<sup>58</sup> The view of art as entertainment cannot account for the fact that many of us choose to engage in the classics despite the effort that is often involved in doing so.

Another problem is presented by the fact that there could never be such a thing as bad or unsuccessful art, since any such qualification would itself rest on the assumption of a non-appetitive standard. To claim that art can never be objectively bad or unsuccessful is patently false,<sup>59</sup> and it is hard to imagine that anyone with actual artistic experience would commit themselves to such a position. Even Hume grants that every work of art is created with some end in mind, and is "to be judged as more or less perfect depending"<sup>60</sup> on the degree to which it fulfills this end. If I set out with the explicit intention of drawing my friend there is a very real way in which I can fail, and this is true even if my friend is so impressed by the effort that they perceive the drawing as being very good. If every other person who sees the drawing is repulsed by it, then my friend's feelings on the matter are touching but ultimately worthless with regards to an evaluation of the technical merits of the work itself. In locating the qualification of art solely in the emotional state of the observer, the sentimental view denies any significance of intent or agency on behalf of the artist.

None of this is to dispute that the arts demand in their audiences the formation of a subjective opinion concerning the work itself. Indeed, this capacity of the art object must be

recognized and confronted in its full intensity. The feelings generated in us by the work of art are internally formed and keenly felt, and a conversation with another person regarding art very frequently takes on the same character as a conversation concerning sex or politics. But one can easily cherish or despise a given work regardless of its actual qualifications as a work of art. Hume is quite right to point out that it is this very aspect that the observer or critic of art must develop most fully: to distinguish between one's own preferential biases and the quality of the work itself is no easy task. But to affect this distinction is to at once admit that there must be aesthetic standards beyond taste. Subsequently, a consideration of taste and opinion is a necessary but insufficient condition for the proper appreciation of the principles and practises of art.

### **3.2 Via Negativa II: Art as Formalism**

The second position to be refuted is here identified as the formalist position, and it stands in direct opposition to the first. Where the sentimental position emphasizes absolute subjectivity, the formalist position insists on absolute objectivity. The formalist position assumes that art can only be that which meets a very specific set of predetermined criteria. This criteria very often comes by way of the imitation of some prior period of history. Ancient Athens, Imperial Rome, and the Italian High Renaissance<sup>IV</sup> have proved popular for this sort of spiritual appropriation.

One example of radical formalism is presented in the academicians of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, who considered the practises of the ancient Greeks to be the sole standard by which all contemporary and future art should be evaluated. This belief was so entrenched that the academy suffered a schism over a controversy concerning the use of colours, with the older generation maintaining that colour in painting was to

IV As we will see, it is not fair to treat the High Renaissance as being only the revival of Classical thought. The intent for the artists of the Renaissance was always to *surpass* their predecessors.

be avoided because it would distract the observer from a proper contemplation of the principles of form.<sup>61</sup> Another example might be found in the tenets of Nazi aesthetic, which permitted emulation of Greek and Roman art but demanded the destruction of anything held to be decadent. In both cases we see that the arts are intended to be imitative. Aesthetics is seen as an imitation or idealization of nature,<sup>62</sup> while art itself is intended to preserve the styles of former masters through the endless reproduction of their greatest works.

The appeal of the formalist position is likely apparent to any appreciator of history. Through its invocation of the grandeur associated with prior eras, the formalist creed seems crowned with the halcyon glow of bygone glory. And that the arts underwent prodigious technical advancement during specific periods of history is indisputable: the golden ratio, the proportions of human form, realistic multiple-point perspectives and many other techniques besides were developed in specific cultures at identifiable historical junctures. These discoveries followed from the most basic of human enterprises, and the ancients derived their techniques from observation, contemplation, and practise. Taken altogether these circumstances appear to impute the formalist position with a certain nobility, an apparent right to claim theirs as a position that does due honour to the timeless truths revealed in beauty.

However, once all nostalgia is stripped away, there are at least two problems that follow from the formalist position. Firstly, the criterion of a radically formalist position is so rigid as to be formulaic. The formalist position demands a clear demarcation of what is and is not allowed in the work of art, and this demarcation is purposefully severe so as to preclude the spontaneous allowance of new styles or the inappropriate development of new media. And whenever new media is permitted or considered to be necessary, the formalist position is obligated to force that media into a simulacra of its predecessors.

The second problem is related to the first problem of formula, and it is that radical formalism risks reducing the arts to a sort of trickery, or mnemonism.<sup>V</sup> Formalism demands an objective criterion, and art is therefore qualified by its closeness of imitation. Consider Hegel's example of Buttner's monkey. Buttner was a professor who had purchased a very expensive book with coloured plates inside. One of these plates featured a chafer that was rendered in such extraordinary realism that Buttner's pet monkey tore the pages from the book in an attempt to eat the beetle.<sup>63</sup> While it is all well and good that we should produce pictures of such accuracy that they fool even the animals, our pursuit of the beautiful should not rest at the deception of beasts. Such reproductions are an incomplete expression of human ingenuity, and the works produced by this approach are closer to a sleight of hand than anything else.<sup>64</sup>

These two points create an ironic state of affairs for the formalist position: in its desperation to locate the qualification of art in fixed standards of beauty, the formalist position abandons the concept of beauty itself. Because "there is no longer a question of the character of *what* is supposed to be imitated, but only of the correctness of the imitation,"<sup>65</sup> artists cease to be appreciated for their talents and the insights of their works are ignored. What is rather appreciated is the shrewdness exhibited in the duplication of images already established. As one might suspect from the earlier treatment of art as sentiment, the arts do require discipline and ought to be evaluated by objective standards, but the arts must also show the possibility of inspiration, mutation, or metamorphosis. It is this expectation of spontaneity that separates the arts from the sciences,<sup>66</sup> and in their efforts to constrain mutability the formalists are trying to turn art into math. This approach denies the artist an exploration of new materials, new mediums, and quite possibly, of new messages. The ostensibly timeless truths promised by the formalists rapidly devolves into dogmatic replication.

<sup>V</sup> Mnemonism refers to an ability to remember and recall unusually long lists of data. It is considered by many to be a problem in the world of competitive gaming. For example, Bobby Fisher has attributed the loss of respect for chess to the fact that the memorization of opening games had made the game itself a mere formula. It was precisely this realization that led to his creation of the Blitz-357 variant.

### 3.3 Via Negativa III: Art as Inspiration

The inspirational theory of art holds that art is an ineffable, unspeakable, and thoroughly mystical experience. Proponents of this theory believe the artist is not so much an agent as he is a conduit that channels mysterious forces external to man, mind, and reason. This position is perhaps most concisely summarized in Jackson Pollock's assertion that, while painting, he was Nature.<sup>67</sup> This was not intended to be a poetic metaphor or a clever euphemism. The inspirational view holds that the artist is a transcendent entity during the act of creation, and as such cannot account for either her work or art itself. Believers tend to be less specific as to whether this is accomplished via tran- or consubstantiation. Indeed, the mere attempt to discuss art under objective terms or to compare competing standards of taste is akin to sacrilege, and one is impelled by this view to speak of art solely in terms of feeling and metaphor.

The appeal of the inspirational theory lies precisely in this quasi-religious, wholly passionate approach. Its strength lies in its willingness to confront the reality of inspiration as well as the intense feelings generated by the arts, albeit in terms of passionate rhetoric. One is not challenged to scrutinize the history of art, nor is one obligated to parse the works of other times and cultures in an attempt to find what they do or do not hold in common; one only needs to sigh wistfully, to speak from the heart, and to abandon all efforts at explaining how the visions of art ever come to be realized here on earth. Put simply, the inspirational model appeals to the romantic aspect of our spirits. It carries with it the same appeal that so-called neo-pagan or post-modern movements do, and generally with the same sorts of people. There is no comprehensive judgement of a thing beyond one's own sensations, and while art can be deconstructed it cannot be criticized.

Needless to say, this approach to art is hardly helpful in understanding aesthetics. The inspirational model provides no reason for how or why an artist should learn the discipline they claim to practise, nor does it provide a vocabulary for describing the learning of that discipline. And we should always be wary of the speaker who claims ineffability when describing their actions. It is one thing for an artist to admit that a given work manifests a number of aspects he had not initially planned, such as a particular recombination of elements infusing the work with an unexpected vitality or character. Inspiration, after all, is mutation. But it is quite another thing for an artist to claim that at no point in the entire process did he intend for anything to occur; such an argument denies intentionality as well as causality, and it is preposterous to think that any artistic endeavour can actually unfold under such circumstances. Or, if it does, it must necessarily be without form, without meaning, and one might suspect, without effort. One is again struck by the aptness of Pollock's work in this regard.

### **3.4 Via Positiva: The Practises and Principles of Art**

Art is the celebration of meaning, and its works are the attempted embodiment of spirit. To substantiate these statements requires that we begin our enquiry with the most basic material conditions necessary for the work of art to exist. Of these, we have already stated that the work of art is a non-natural object, and is therefore created by human activity. But art is also distinct from other types of activity, and this distinction needs to be more fully understood in order to afford art its full due. Especially helpful in this regard is Hannah Arendt's description of the *vita activa*, or those common activities perceived to be vital to the realization of human identity.<sup>VI</sup> Unpacking the *vita activa* here also has the advantage of providing us with a vocabulary from which to develop the narrative that will be used throughout this thesis. Art, Arendt tells us, is a work-object, and its

VI There is no functional difference between Arendt's description of the *vita activa* and Darby's account of the underlying concern. Indeed, Arendt's *vita activa* is itself a categorization of the kinds of activity that might make up the underlying concerns. This paper takes the terms to be in agreement with one another, if not synonymous.

works are described by her as "the most intensely worldly of all tangible things,"<sup>68</sup> a statement which itself demands we understand what Arendt means by work and worldliness. Work is better identified by reference to its relationship to labour and action, and for that reason an abbreviated account of all three is now presented here.

### **3.5 The Vita Activa, and the Arts as Worldly Objects**

Labour refers to those activities that sustain the human species by producing things to be consumed or by otherwise responding to the natural cycles of growth and decay. It can be seen in agriculture and housework. As such, labour is necessary but futile.<sup>69</sup> Necessary, because our life-processes and environments must be maintained, but futile because such activity is without end. One cannot speak of a finished labour-object, but must instead describe a reprieve from labouring activity: labour is never permitted anything so concrete as a noun.<sup>70</sup> And while labouring often produces a surplus, such produce is still destined for destruction by rot or consumption.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, to labour is to be a slave to necessity,<sup>72</sup> and a life defined by labour is neither free nor fully human. Bound to the recurrence of nature and qualified by basic biological processes, labouring activities are not essentially different than those of animals, and "[w]hat men share with all other forms of animal life"<sup>73</sup> cannot be the basis for a free or uniquely human existence.

In contrast to this servile recurrence stands work, which can be identified as being a finite activity whose end is apparent with the completion of its object. Work therefore requires a discipline by which a process can be marked as having a beginning, an end, and an objective standard for the evaluation of the finished project.<sup>74</sup> Work-objects are intended to be used rather than used up, and are thus identified by their capacity to endure. And while a work-object will eventually be broken or exhausted, this destruction is not the purpose of the object but is rather

incidental to its use.<sup>75</sup> Through their durability, work-objects establish a human presence over nature in a way that perishable goods cannot.<sup>76</sup> In the provision of a stable world of durable things, work activity ensures that "men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table."<sup>77</sup> Put otherwise, work-objects establish the conditions permitting a human world to exist in a given environment. Thus, the worldliness granted by work-objects is nothing less than a concrete relationship through which identity and endeavour are stabilized and preserved.

However, the overarching standard of work is instrumentality, and work-objects are expressions of utility: work-objects tend to be useful but meaningless.<sup>78</sup> The ends of work are intended to become the means for further ends, and a life of work is then characterized by its subordination to the temporary goals of others. The utilitarianism inherent in work devalues both human and non-human nature alike by reducing the world to a collection of tools and available materials.<sup>79</sup> Conversely, a meaningful standard must be one that is permanent and remains whole regardless of whether or not a person achieves it.<sup>80</sup> Working on a project "in order to" accomplish something useful necessitates that one's standards are always bound to the desires of others, whereas undertaking action "for the sake of" something meaningful qualifies activity by overarching standards that can survive changes of subject or circumstance.<sup>81</sup>

Meaningful standards are received in contemplation and affected through action. Contemplation is the age-old attempt of the philosophers to uncover fundamental truths, "whose everlasting beauty can neither be brought about through the producing interference of man nor be changed through his consumption of them."<sup>82</sup> The standards discovered in contemplation are realized through action, or those speeches and deeds that mark an individual as genuinely unique.<sup>83</sup> Every human being possesses this promise of natality,<sup>84</sup> of creating a new beginning, and such deeds

as accomplish this are made known to other human beings by way of speech or representation. Action marks us as neither animal nor instrument, but as a wilful individual actor who is recognized as a "who" rather than a "what."<sup>85</sup> Consequently, action requires a plurality of individuals and the presence of a knowable public sphere within which we can participate in the mutual construction of distinctly human narratives. The public sphere is thus constituted of those concepts or events deemed "worthy of being seen or heard," while "the irrelevant becomes automatically a private matter."<sup>86</sup> In short, action distinguishes us as unique to others even as it makes them unique to us, and thereby provides the stories by which we come to be identified within a plurality of others.<sup>87</sup>

To sum the relationship just described, labour is a necessary but futile activity that sustains life, thereby enabling work and the production of work-objects; these objects are in turn used to create a world of durable things, whose presence allows for the environments and conditions in which we contemplate, reason, and interact. Such interactions are the basis of human knowledge and meaningful activity, and the hierarchy just described is how the private lives of individuals find meaning in the community of the public sphere. Humanity is defined by the terms with which it remembers its activities in the world of work-objects.<sup>VII</sup> And here is revealed the foundation for understanding art as "the most intensely worldly of all tangible things."<sup>88</sup>

As work-objects the works of art contribute to the durability of the world, but unlike other work-objects they are not intended to be used. Sculptures, paintings, and other such works exist as a representation, and they are created specifically with the sole intention of enduring. To use an artwork as one would any other tool would destroy the work and deny its proper function. The arts as worldly objects thus enjoy a delightful paradox: where a tool's durability is incidental to its usefulness, an artwork's usefulness is incidental to its durability.<sup>89</sup> And as worldly objects, the arts

VII This is obviously very similar to Hegel and Kojève's own account. But where Hegel and Kojève tend to use labour, action, and speech interchangeably, Arendt offers the advantage of discriminating between the futility of labour, the world-creation of work, and the uniquely human natality of action.

require a public to observe them and action to qualify them. Without reification, thoughts and concepts would fade with the passage of time or the deaths of peoples, and even action would fall to simple futility.<sup>90</sup> But action and thought can be captured in a specific content provided it is substantiated by a common understanding, and artwork is uniquely able to "show some extraordinary event in its full significance."<sup>91</sup> This necessarily public aspect of art qualifies it as a remembrance, and it is for remembrance that human endeavours are undertaken even as it is the material in which our actions endure.

Walter Benjamin has described this intensity as an aura, and he ascribes it to the unique history held by a work of art: original artworks undergo historical changes specific to them alone, and this history imbues an artwork with a character of authenticity that is denied to mass-produced objects. The aura of an artwork emerges from its being a singular creation with an individual history occupying a specific space.<sup>92</sup> Thus, for example, a statue of Venus "stood in a different traditional context with the Greeks, who made it an object of veneration, than with the clerics of the Middle Ages, who viewed it as an ominous idol."<sup>93</sup> But in either case, and despite their differences of belief, observers from both cultures "were equally confronted with its uniqueness, that is, its aura."<sup>94</sup> The intensity of the aura is such that observers are confronted by its presence and are compelled to situate it against the backdrops of their own traditions.

Consequently, even the most primitive cultures have had artworks in the forms of songs, oratory and cave-paintings. Acutely aware of their mortality, prehistoric and ancient cultures granted the arts a mystical or religious status: artworks held a ritual character,<sup>95</sup> and the observation or experiencing of the arts facilitated the celebration of the divine. This original cultic value combines with the history of a particular work and the traditions of its observers to give art an aura of authority.

### 3.6 Arts and Culture: The Celebration of Meaning

It is not by accident that I refer to the cultic value of art, for the arts are intimately bound to culture. Whether found in the monolithic architecture of Egypt, the sculptures of Rome, whether found in the elegant geometries of Iran or in the vivid frescoes of Spain, it is undeniably the case that the prerogatives of a people are made manifest in their artworks. Culture and identity are shaped and preserved by the arts, and the arts in turn celebrate cultural narratives. Now, the root of culture is the *cultus*, which is indeed cultish.<sup>96</sup> *Cultus* refers to a clear demarcation of belonging by establishing boundaries of limits and possibilities around the identity of a thing. While disagreements may arise *within* a culture, that culture will nevertheless stand united against most external tests of its identity. C.P. Snow describes it succinctly: "Without thinking about it, they respond alike. That is what culture means."<sup>97</sup> As such, cultures tend to be exclusive, conservative in outlook, static in development, and certain of purpose,<sup>98</sup> the homogeneity of their ends ensures the uniqueness of their identity relative to other peoples.

Culture is best contrasted with civilization, and where the former is compelled to exclude, the latter is marked by its eagerness to include. Civilizations are neither prescribed nor static, nor do they seek to affect impermeable boundaries of space or identity. Civilizations are in fact "complex wholes comprised of cultures,"<sup>99</sup> which serve as their constituent parts. It is therefore necessary for civilizations to attempt the softening of cultural boundaries so that they might be more easily aggregated and submitted to the regulations of the civilian population: civilizations are multi-cultural. Civilizations then tend to be inclusive, progressive in outlook, dynamic in development, and offer a laxity of shared ends;<sup>100</sup> the heterogeneity of their constituent populations demands that they be regulated by homogenizing laws.

To participate in a culture is to take part in the active preservation of a greater identity that is intended to stand over and above the meager individual. Thus, *cultus* is also to be found at the root of all attributions of divine significance, and we find elements of the cultus in the notion of celebration.<sup>101</sup> The intention of celebration is a holy day, or a time of holiday set aside for the recognition of an idea perceived to hold especial meaning for a specific narrative. As such, a celebration requires a special kind of time, and this time cannot be thought of as a simple reprieve from one's labours. Celebrations do not occur in the absence of business, they are events that give cause for the cessation of such busy-ness in the first place.<sup>102</sup> Celebrations are a time of leisure, or time spent in the pursuit of those activities believed to be meaningful in themselves. These are the liberal arts, free activities "that do not serve some other purpose and so are not servile,"<sup>103</sup> and they are precisely coeval with Arendt's understanding of action and contemplation. Thus, art is shown to be a celebration of meaning as a direct result of its causal, material, and practical realities.

### **3.7 Form, Content, and Understanding**

A time of celebration is a time for understanding. It is a time which allows for the contemplation of universal concepts as these find expression in particular objects and symbols. And so it is with excellent art. Herein we finally see *why* it is we are driven to create and appreciate art in the first place: we will continue to create and appreciate art for as long as we are thinking beings possessed of senses and in search of understanding. In his description of this more cognitive approach to art, Hegel emphasizes that art "only fulfills its supreme task when it has placed itself in the same sphere as religion and philosophy,"<sup>104</sup> or when it concerns itself with the pursuit of spiritual truth. This brings us to the final point I would like to consider in our identification of aesthetics and the works of art, this being a discussion of form and content.

Now, the significance so often attributed to the arts must necessarily involve the perception of their contents. But at the same time, we can see that the contents of art cannot be valued as a simple result of their historical accuracy or their attention to detail. Artists frequently depict events they could not have experienced or of things that never were. Forms are idealized, deconstructed, recombined, and transformed, personal details are invented or omitted, and the work of art is better understood as a representation than it is a recollection.<sup>105</sup> This is not to downplay realism in the arts, and verisimilitude is always a laudable goal. But it is to say that the content of the work of art must be concerned with the representation of ideas, and these ideas will in turn be expressed through whatever vocabulary of symbols is available to the artist. A vocabulary of symbols is generated in a number of ways, including observation, extrapolation, and transformation, all of which point to that quintessential element contained in all art: the imagination of the artist.

It is the faculty of imagination that at once distinguishes the true artist from the mnemonist.<sup>106</sup> For while it is true that the arts arise from given disciplines, it is equally so that a predisposition towards imagination is indispensable to the creation of art. It is in imagination that the artist becomes free, and it is in this freedom that the artist is better able to capture the interplay of thought and action. This is to say that art can capture an event in its full significance precisely because it does not simply reiterate the cold, hard facts, abstracted from all sensual consideration, nor does it have to be satisfied with vague opinions and spectacular appeal. Rather, it gives over to us a depiction of an event as it might be remembered by the passions or understood by the mind's eye. This in turn qualifies the work of art as a mediation of thought and practise, and in its works we find nothing less than a microcosm of the spirit already described.<sup>107</sup>

But if art is an attempt to make manifest a middle ground between thought and sense, then an evaluation of content alone is insufficient to an appreciation of its quality. The form of that

content must also be taken into account, and the mediums of art show a special relationship to the configuration of a work's contents. Hegel proposes that tangible mediums are more obdurate, less plastic, and therefore less free than intangible mediums, while immaterial mediums have a greater degree of freedom and can therefore better represent details or complexities of thought.<sup>108</sup> Now, Hegel also correlates the preeminent mediums of a culture with their development or sophistication of reason, and he argues that this occurs on the levels of both the culture and global history. It is not within the scope of this thesis to explore the latter allegation, but there is a strong correlation between the tangibilities of medium and the *profundity* of the ideas that can thereby be expressed.<sup>109</sup>

A brief comparison of Hegel's divisions of will against his notes on the traditional mediums should suffice to demonstrate what is meant. When art is first being appropriated or developed by a culture, it is only “a mere search for portrayal” rather “than a capacity for true presentation.”<sup>110</sup> This is to say that there exists here a necessary tension between form and content, such that the work of art is itself inadequate to a grasp of the thing being depicted.<sup>111</sup> This is art as symbolic, and it owes its origins to the subjective reasoning of the arbitrary will. Symbolic art might idolize nature, but it rarely idealizes it, and its contents might be considered as loathsome, grotesque, or alien to those who approach its works outside of the contexts informing their creation. Symbolic art is rarely concerned with realism, for its adherents hold explicitly that the form and content of a given work are inadequate to the entity or force being presented. But at the same time the symbolic approaches are said by Hegel to possess great sublimity. Believing that the truth or divinity of a work can only ever be poorly expressed in the work itself, the observer is impelled to treat it as a reflection in which the truth might be glimpsed, even if only as a simulacra.<sup>112</sup> Put otherwise, the atavism of the symbolic approach compels its audiences to the active consideration and contemplation of the thing represented, rather than demanding of them an in-depth analysis of the work itself.

Architecture is argued by Hegel to be well suited to symbolic understanding. This is because architectural work *presents* itself for use and consideration, but by itself it rarely *represents* anything; an “unknown block of stone may symbolize the Divine, but it does not represent it,”<sup>113</sup> and as a result “the meaning cannot be completely pictured in the expression.”<sup>114</sup> Any meaning to be found in a building cannot be derived solely from its appearance, and its inner meaning and outward form are rarely correspondent. Further, all architecture is unfree in that it serves a utilitarian purpose, whether it be as a political forum, a religious temple, or a social habitat. Like the political activities it so frequently embodies, architecture hovers on a horizon between liberal art and practical craft. And where particularity is invested into architecture, this cannot be said to be a result of that medium, but must rather be a result of the inclusion of another. Architecture and sculpture have proved to be long-term allies in this regard.

Sculpture is associated with the second stage of aesthetic development, which Hegel has somewhat characteristically opted to call the classical form. The classical form of art accomplishes a two-fold evolution, insofar as it ceases to treat the spirit of a thing as indeterminate or abstract while simultaneously recognizing the human element necessary for all understanding. Subsequently, classical art celebrates its divinities with human content captured in human forms. I believe that Hegel is quite right to suggest that “in so far as art's task is to bring the spiritual before our eyes in a sensuous manner, it must get involved in this anthropomorphism,”<sup>115</sup> for it is at once apparent that works depicting people tend to be more reflective, or more immersive, than are the more ambiguous symbols drawn from the environs of nature. Sculpture thus provides “the lightning-flash of individuality”<sup>116</sup> missing in architecture. Architecture might give us the temple, but it is up to sculpture to supply the pantheon;<sup>117</sup> where a temple provides its followers with a space to pray *in*, sculpture infuses a material with a presence to pray *to*.

There is a fittedness to using such religious metaphors as the arts have traditionally been bound to the religions of their day. This partly explains, for example, why works of art should so consistently be imbued with mythic significance, such that a statue of Venus might be worshipped. Hegel describes this stage of development as “art in its highest vocation.”<sup>118</sup> Here, art is no longer a representative or a carrier of understanding, it is held to be an actual embodiment of divine entity. We might otherwise say that art in its highest vocation occurs somewhere in between the two poles identified by Benjamin, or when art holds a dynamic equilibrium between cultic value and popular expression. It is neither the totem in a cave hidden from all but the shaman, nor is it the public spectacle orchestrated by demagogues or expected of state-sponsored artisans, but it is rather that art which an entire people can approach and perceive as being synonymous with the truths qualifying their identities and daily activities.

However, in classical art the spirit of the thing is manifested in and as a particular individual, and the singularity that marks sculpture's greatest accomplishment is also the limit of its expression. The third and final form of development is the romantic, and here the work of art is realized to be both particular in its content and universal in its meaning. Romantic art turns from the effort to perfectly embody single moments of spirit and instead tries to capture a form and content that will enable the mind to grasp the meaning underlying a given work. In some ways, the romantic is a return to symbolism<sup>119</sup> insofar as there is once again introduced a known division between form and content. But where symbolism finds this division to be appropriate and unavoidable and consequently ignores it, romantic art acknowledges the inadequacies of expression inherent to its works and thereby establishes a dialectic between work and observer by which the division might be reconciled in the mind.<sup>120</sup> The realism demanded by the classical form is now incidental to the capacity of the work to evoke thought, and the mind delights in the myriad devices of the romantic. Conversely, artists and audiences alike cease to attribute divinity to the works of art, and in lieu of

gods or the ideal, irony<sup>121</sup> and the idyllic<sup>122</sup> become prominent. But whether it is pursuing the meaning of a work or disavowing the existence of any such truth, the romantic arts are characterized above all as being vehicles for thought. It is this faculty of development that leads Hegel to conclude that art is of spiritual development in the same way that religion and philosophy are. But for Hegel, art is but one step in this evolution, and to mourn the death of its highest vocation makes no more sense than it does to mourn a child's coming of age.<sup>123</sup>

Hegel describes the three romantic mediums as being painting, music, and poetry. These are fitted to the romantic because they are not limited by space or nature, but are instead relatively intangible and therefore possess a greater freedom of representation. Put otherwise, the symbolic and classical forms and mediums are characterized by their being objects mediated by space, and as three-dimensional objects they must be confronted at this same material level. But the mediums of the romantic form are less tangible, more *temporal*, and therefore better able to participate in the distinctly human aspects of thought and mind.<sup>VIII</sup> Consequently, thought turns away from being immersed in the sensual and instead starts to turn the sensual towards the service of thought. Art becomes self-conscious, and is increasingly concerned with its own import and meaning. At the same time, the romantic arts are more open to suggestion, more desirous of interpretation, and the styles of their culture or civilization will generally be more permeable: romantic arts tend to seek public expression and to incorporate new messages and mediums.

In painting, the very ideas of space and mass undergo a radical transformation. Painting abandons the necessity of a determined three-dimensional space and instead affects a fascimile of the same upon the two-dimensional planes of a canvas. Using nothing more than pigments and dyes, the painter utilizes “visibility as such ... developed into colour”<sup>124</sup> in order to create for his

VIII Kojeve states that Space is equal to Nature, while Time is equal to Man, or Reason. Subsequently, the temporality seen in intangible mediums is indicative of its lying closer to the regions of the mind than to natural sensation.

viewers a projected reality. The contents of a painting can themselves be chosen from “the whole realm of particularity,”<sup>125</sup> and the efforts of the painter are limited only by his own skill and imagination. Put otherwise, the relative intangibility of the materials of paint – being, after all, only liquids, oils, and a bit of fabric – frees it from the constraints of both matter and space, thereby enabling the painter to better portray the objects of imagination. Additionally, a painting serves no immediately practical use, and as such may be freed from expectations of utility.

Music and poetry are even less tangible, and as such are able to proceed still further into the realms of detailed thought. Where painting still accepts and attempts to emulate materials in space, neither music nor poetry are expected to pay much tribute to spatial relationships. Music takes for its material the configuration of sound, composed with rhythms and meters, and in this it relies less on space than it does on time. And poetry abandons even the bare structure provided in melody, holding its creations to concept and narrative alone. Both mediums are thus better understood as temporal phenomena; their works are best suited to the representation of feeling, thought, and action.<sup>126</sup> It is not without cause that political philosophers have observed the correlations between the music and spirit of a people,<sup>IX</sup> and it is likewise evident that many cultures have entrusted their spiritual preservation to the dramaturgy of epic poetry.

Now, no one culture or civilization is likely to embrace any single medium. Pagans sang songs, and technocrats still sculpt. Nor am I saying that artists do not combine mediums. Architecture, sculpture, and painting are often integrated, and music and poetry frequently cooperate through the compositions of lyric. But I am arguing that the quality of a work of art is not a simple calculation of content and technique. Rather, it emerges from the harmonization of concept, content, and form: architecture establishes a material presence that cannot be matched by

IX There is of course Plato's well known advice concerning the music of the republic. The Chinese sage Lu Bu We likewise linked the stability of a regime to its music, with one combination considered to be so averse to order that it was referred to as the "music of decline."

poetry, while poetry represents thought with a clarity and nuance that is wholly denied to architecture. In appraising a work it is therefore incumbent on the participant to evaluate the thing represented in terms of this relationship.<sup>X</sup> Likewise, it is often the case that the *preeminent* contents and forms of a culture do have a marked correlation to the practises and paradigms that a people find definitive or meaningful.

Much can then be gained from an investigation into what a people consider worthy of representation or what they take to be their preeminent mediums. Such investigation should in turn take place as an attempt to locate in particular works of art the representation of Overarching Metaphor and underlying concern,<sup>127</sup> for it is from the interaction between these that the symbols present in a work are likely to be chosen and implemented. Conversely, when we see symbolic structures being deconstructed or transformed – when, in short, we see a discursive rupture – we will have before us an indicator of crisis. To better illustrate the relationship being proposed we turn now to a brief recap of Arendt's account of the *vita activa* of the Greeks and Medieval Christians, which provides the further advantage of letting us compare prior accounts of causality to our own modern ones. Arendt's account is here interwoven with Darby's own Overarching Metaphor to create a narrative by which the dialogue of art, spirit, and crisis can be made conceptually clear and practically concrete.

#### **4 First Rehearsal: Ancient Greece and the Natural Metaphor**

The first age in our corroboration of art and spirit is also that age traditionally credited as the beginning of the canon of Western thought. The Natural Metaphor of the Classical Pagan Age is perhaps best shown through the works of Plato and Aristotle. The animating principle of the

X I would hesitantly suggest that the reason Abstractivism in painting is so unpopular is because it utterly denies this harmony of meaning, content, and form. Trying to capture a non-image in the wholly visual medium of paint may be a laudable experiment, but it can hardly be intelligible.

Natural Metaphor is that of eternal recurrence, and it is intended to encompass both human and non-human nature alike. Under the Natural Metaphor, everyday activities and experiences are perceived as being microcosmic reflections of a macrocosmic order:<sup>128</sup> being is concentric. Subsequently, Plato accounts for human activity and understanding by reference to the cosmos while Aristotle relies instead on biology. Both thinkers consistently refer back to their respective metaphors when accounting for the practises of man within the city and amongst each other. Thus were the immediate experiences of the Greeks bound under a common collection of symbols, carried across the thresholds of mutual understanding, and made known to others.<sup>129</sup>

In consequence of their belief that man was believed to occupy a place between animal and divine nature, the *vita activa* of the pagan Greeks was predicated on the dichotomy between labour and action, while work was believed to have little significance beyond simple utility. It was recognized that labouring activities were necessary for the maintenance of life-processes, but it was also believed that a life so defined by contingency amounted to little more than slavery. Indeed, it was through the possession of slaves that a Greek householder was liberated from domestic drudgery; freed from the moil and toil of domestic labours, the householder thereby acquired the time and resources to participate in the political interactions of the public sphere.<sup>130</sup> The Greek understanding was that a person only became free, unique, and fully human in the action of the public sphere, as this sphere existed above contingency and provided the plurality necessary to have one's deeds preserved and told by others.

Notably, Arendt suggests that the Greek understanding of politics was distinctive to them alone, and that the politics of other peoples are more generally a response to contingency or an ordering of parts. This distinctive understanding arises from the character of the Greek city-state, which assumed "a very special and freely chosen form of political organization,"<sup>131</sup> whose

performance demanded extraordinary insight, acumen, or luck. Thus, while the Greeks saw that politics allowed for the transcendence of mortality via the immortality of collective memory,<sup>132133</sup> it was not yet considered to be the most enlightened of human activities.<sup>134</sup> Such enlightenment was believed to reside in the eternal truths contemplated by philosophy. Action required the standards supplied in contemplation just as contemplation was realized in the plurality of action. But while thought and action were believed to have a necessary relationship to one another, they were nevertheless held to be separate. Pagan causality, embedded as it was in the sensual, could not conceive of the conflation of the material and the abstract.<sup>135</sup> It is small wonder that philosophers would periodically remove themselves from the polis: to act politically is to cease contemplation just as contemplation requires that one not suffer the distractions of the political.<sup>136</sup>

The arts of the Age reflect this same dichotomy between the accidental manifestations and the eternal principles of nature. Perhaps the clearest embodiment of the arts of the Classical Pagan Age is seen in the Parthenon, a building that was at once a temple, a public forum, and a political community. The Parthenon was constructed according to architectural principles believed to embody the same “democratic values and independent thought” that they helped to facilitate.<sup>137</sup> Its interior is decorated throughout with works such as the *Lapith Fighting a Centaur*, which “celebrated the triumph of reason over passion, civilization over barbarism, Greece over Persia.”<sup>138</sup> The Natural Metaphor is represented throughout the entire structure: the shape of its columns and arches are meant to mirror principles of the natural world, while their orderly configuration was thought to demonstrate the divine faculty of reason inherent in man. Similarly, the Parthenon demonstrates the power of the aura, as cultures succeeding the Greeks felt impelled to situate the Parthenon within their own common understandings. Over the centuries, the Parthenon has been a church, a mosque, a military facility, an archaeological site, and an icon of commerce.<sup>139</sup>

Nevertheless, while the Greeks recognized the necessity of fabricating artists they yet held them in disdain owing to the use of tools by those same artists. Tools were seen to indicate a preference for the expedient fulfilment of relative human desires, which reduced man from a unique being to a devaluer of world and nature.<sup>140</sup> The Greek emphasis on thought and action meant that the utmost prestige was awarded to neither painter nor sculptor, but rather to poets and actors. Arendt points out that speech is an immaterial medium, and poetry is the least thing-like of all art-objects. As with action, poetry's capacity for remembrance lies in a recognition of its memorability,<sup>XI</sup> which in turn assures its preservation as a repeated performance. The performing arts are organic, they adhere to objective standards of evaluation and respond to the audience while retaining an intelligible narrative.<sup>141</sup> This qualified mutability makes every performance unique, and it is the reason why the theatre is "the political art par excellence; only there is the political sphere of human life transposed into art."<sup>142</sup> The performing arts are then the medium best suited to the imitation of action.<sup>143</sup> Subsequently, poets were respected throughout ancient Greece due to the correspondence between their medium and the public sphere. The content depicted in their arts show the Greeks' assumption of the Natural Metaphor, while their preference for spoken mediums marked them as a people who considered action to be inherently superior to either work or labour.

It is interesting to note that while the Greeks did not seem too concerned with any alleged death of art, they did entertain the notion of its finding completion. Aristotle, for example, writes that the genre of tragedy had "attained its own nature"<sup>144</sup> in the theatre of his day, meaning that the essential character of the genre was now fully revealed. Put otherwise, the development of a specific genre was perceived to have ended when the practises and purposes appropriate to that genre were fully realized. Indeed, we will see that this was a somewhat common conception amongst the ancients, and many artists believed it was their obligation to contribute towards the

XI Arendt defines memorability as an artwork's "chance to be permanently fixed in the recollection of humanity." It is the likelihood of the work's preservation as a remembrance. p.170. Note that remembrance is a preservation over time, and, we have already noted that the intangible mediums have an especially temporal character.

perfection of their exact disciplines. Arguments of this sort constitute what might be called a teleological view of the end of art insofar as they rest on the assumption that each branch of art has an end unto itself, and that the development of a branch stops upon the fulfilment of its purpose.

## **5 Second Rehearsal: Christian Age and Medieval Europe**

The Pagan Age ends with the fall of Rome, and with that comes the onset of a new spiritual crisis. When Rome fell it was as if the centre of the Western world had ceased to exist, and the Natural Metaphor provided little explanation as to how the immortal city could have fallen to the hands of barbarians. This monumental event became an allegory for the frailty of human endeavour against the perpetual tides of savagery and ignorance.<sup>145</sup> After "the downfall of the Roman Empire, it was the Catholic Church that offered a substitute for the citizenship which had formerly been the prerogative of municipal government,"<sup>146</sup> and in this provision Christianity established itself as an identifier of human prerogatives. Augustine's *City of God* marks the beginning of the Classical Christian age and its accompanying metaphor of History, or the notion of historical progress. Augustine's work combined the Hebrew conception of unilinear time with the Christian project of redeeming the past,<sup>147</sup> and the thinkers of the Classical Christian Age accounted for the past in terms of the progress being made towards a desired end: the profane cities of men were a reflection of the divine city of god, and our purpose was to work towards the realization of that divinity on earth.

In the transition between pagan and Christian belief systems, common understandings of thought and reason also underwent a dramatic transformation. The metaphor of History expected that God was no longer to be found on earth, and the divine became a projected beyond that would only be realized by man upon either his death or the completion of his works. As an ineffable and deeply personal experience, God could be contemplated, but he could not be summoned or

adequately described.<sup>148</sup> Christian thinkers avoided the temptations of the public sphere in favour of the beatific salvation of private contemplation: the periodic isolation of the Greek philosophers became the near-total monastic seclusion of Christian monks.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, immortality was no longer achieved through a recognition of our actions on earth, but rather we were rewarded with transcendence after death. What mattered was less the performance of great deeds than the emulation of good works. But the moment a good work is made public its purity of intention is called into doubt, and medieval Europe was not united by the heroic actions of a shared public sphere, it was carried through on principles of love, charity, and brotherhood.<sup>150</sup> These principles are predicated on faithful obedience rather than initiative, and the familial community of the private sphere was emphasized owing to its intimate quietude and non-political character.<sup>151</sup> The demands of the public sphere gradually came to be considered an impediment to the living of a good life.<sup>152</sup>

But early Christians still understood themselves to be engaged in a very real project of creating the city of God on earth. The apparent conflicts generated by the expectations of productivity and privation are reconciled in the working mentality, and work replaced action as the basis by which to identify meaningful human activity. Craftsmen need relatively private spaces in order to work, and the creation of an object takes place through the realization of an intended goal via the work-process. The object, once completed, contributes to the development of human presence through the transformation of nature. It is fitting that a work ethic was associated with holiness, since the work-process is a perfect microcosm of the Historical Metaphor.

This meant that communication within and among communities would be structured on the principles of fabrication. And indeed, communal activities in the medieval period effectively functioned as extensions of the private and economic spheres. The monopoly of power held by Church and lord over their vassals was akin to that of a landowner in ancient Greece. Fiefdoms

were ruled over by lords who perceived themselves as being heads of a house, and alliances between states were explicitly described in familial terms. Marketplaces provided a place for the community to meet and speak, and were centered around displays of "conspicuous production":<sup>153</sup> this consisted of craftsman practising their skills in open spaces set aside for that purpose, thereby permitting the public display of the normally private working activity. The common good of medieval philosophy proceeded from a perceived commonality of basic material and spiritual interests, these being the maintenance of life and the worship of God. The various political and economic interactions needed to maintain communities, cities, and states were justified on the basis that they could be limited to carefully regulated spheres of activity. This arrangement preserved the generally domestic lifestyles of fiefdom and monastery.<sup>154</sup>

The arts of medieval Europe reflect the principles just described. The elevation of work meant that art-objects were now designed to be both portable and durable so they might accompany missionaries or be more easily exchanged. Similarly, the art-process itself would require an increasing amount of time and devotion. Where artworks once took days or weeks, they could now take months, years, or in the case of architecture, entire lifetimes. And works such as *The Good Shepherd*<sup>155</sup> or *Effects of Good Government in the City and the Country*<sup>156</sup> use essentially similar styles to depict essentially similar values despite being made over seven centuries apart: each illustrates faith in a divine plan, productive utility, and the gradual fulfilment of duty. Interestingly, the works of the medieval period are distinctly flawed insofar as there is often little attention to realism or perspective. The Historical Metaphor does not demand unerring accuracy or idealization of forms so much as it requires a faithful record of known events and the allegorical promise of future events. The fabricating artist was no longer held to be an inconvenient necessity, they were honoured for their contributions in developing Christian values.<sup>157</sup>

Nowhere is this elevation of art-as-work more clear than in the Classical Christian Age's emphasis on architecture.<sup>158</sup> While architecture has always held a political and religious significance,<sup>159</sup> the medieval Europeans recognized this relationship as explicit. Master builders and their guilds were honoured for their craftsmanship, and the churches and cathedrals they would be commissioned to construct were synonymous with the identity of Christian peoples.<sup>160</sup> Sites such as St. James or Notre-Dame became pilgrimage churches, and held such ritual significance that believers would take life-threatening journeys in order to experience the specific aura of a single church or its attendant relics and artworks. In the course of these odysseys, pilgrims would meet and share stories. Even in the thoroughly privative environment of medieval Europe, the celebrations of art were able to create public spheres of common interaction. The incorporation of increasingly sophisticated processes and technologies lead to new artistic mediums such as stained glass, and culminated in the Gothic architecture<sup>XII</sup> that marks the peak of Classical Christian art:<sup>161</sup> technology was not perceived as an impediment to spiritual understanding provided its application was germane to the work at hand.

But the Classical Christian Age ended, and with it went the motivating principles of the Historical Metaphor. The gradual disintegration of ecclesiastical authority resulted in a spiritual crisis characterized by an increasing alienation of ourselves from all prior worlds of understanding. However, the processes of world alienation took many centuries to manifest, and in their occurrence we can see the gradual development of the new metaphors by which people could again make sense of their daily lives. The Age of Technology is assembled from the wreckage of the feudal system, and it is here worth discussing the principles of technology in order that we will more readily observe them at practise in our coming descriptions of modernity.

XII Gothic architecture may also represent the first stages of the transition into technological metaphor. The spires and bulbs of Gothic architecture were designed to gather, focus, and *transmit* the prayers of the faithful to God: a kind of spiritual precursor to the radio.

## 6 Setting the Stage: The Age of Technology

Technology is described by Marshall McLuhan as being the means by which human beings extend their muscular and neurological systems into the world around them, thereby permitting the manipulation of our external environments according to the demands and desires of our internal selves.<sup>162</sup> Its principle means of evaluation is the ease or convenience such extensions have in the execution of their functions. As Darby indicates, technology is therefore "the progressively rational (efficient) arrangement of means and ends (for humans) and cause and effect (for nature)."<sup>163</sup> Efficiency is a standard that can be applied in relation to any two functions; its purest form of expression is the reduction of means and ends to singularity, or the establishment of a closed system where thoughts and ideas immediately become concrete practises.

The notions of such virtual reality are now so commonplace it is difficult to understand just how radical they are. Consider that almost all prior ages divided thought and action: the Greeks believed them to be different spheres of being, while the Christians held that the former would become the latter through the mediation of time. But the modern age actively seeks the *copenetration* of thought and action, and technology can be understood as a reduction of the differences between *techne* and *logos*, or making and knowing. Put otherwise, technology works towards the establishment of a virtual reality, a reality in which our environments are made to be increasingly more responsive to individual thoughts and desires. Technology is then identified by its tendency towards the systemization of both human and non-human nature alike.<sup>164</sup> Likewise, its own standard of efficiency ensures that technology seeks, and can expect, an exponential rate of proliferation. Consequently, while the Technological Age has so far been the briefest, it has already seen the emergence of three Metaphors. The three Metaphors of the Technological Age are the Mechanical, the Hydraulic-Pneumatic and the Electromagnetic Metaphors.

## 6.1 The Mechanical Metaphor

The period of the Mechanical Metaphor roughly corresponds to that range of time extending from the late 1400s up until the closing of the Industrial Revolution; it incorporates the close of the Renaissance, the whole of the Enlightenment, and a good measure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Mechanical Metaphor is clearly captured in the symbol of the clock as explicated by Hobbes in his introduction to *Leviathan*. Here, Hobbes represents society as an artificial man conforming to the functions of clockwork mechanics. Hobbes is further able to provide us with an account of man who has become both matter and maker: this feat is neatly accomplished by his collapsing of "Aristotle's first and third causes and second and fourth causes,"<sup>165</sup> which in turn permits the casual dismissal of both religious and teleological causalities. In doing so, Hobbes gives us man "presented as a projected plan in the form of a grid," and thereby articulates what was then a popular conception of humankind.<sup>166</sup>

The Mechanical Metaphor suggests that one interpret one's experiences in terms of motion, power, friction, and inertia.<sup>167</sup> Human and non-human nature alike is perceived as adhering to infinitely regressive causal sequences, and man's activities in the world can be measured as finite expressions of useful projects until such time as inertia, entropy, or death prevents the further transformations of stored forces, work-activities, or life-processes. Taken altogether, this metaphor substantiates a *vita activa* wherein work remains prominent but work-processes are increasingly specialized and predicated on technological assumptions. The artists of this period incorporated the natural sciences into their arts on unprecedented scales, and their works depict the radical transformations of metaphor and medium that occurred throughout the early development of modern society. This is to say that in examining the transition of logics between Renaissance and

Enlightenment, we are also observing the wellspring of the modern malaise.

## **6.2 From World to Alienation: the Renaissance and the Enlightenment**

The Renaissance blooms from the erosion of faith previously vested in the feudal arrangements of the medieval age. Arendt describes three events that are of particular importance in understanding the material causes of those changes. The first of these events was the discovery of America and the exploration of the globe. The Age of Discovery challenged our spatial relationship with the world. Insofar as we were bound to specific environments and conditions, our relationship to the land was one that was objectively defined. Through the mastery of space we found that our experiences were no longer limited by distance nor made more intimate by proximity,<sup>168</sup> and in this we suffered an alienation from our immediate environments. By opening the whole of the globe to the desires of humanity, the illimitable horizons of the Earth were made finite, and the relationship between ourselves and our surroundings became one of preference rather than necessity.<sup>169</sup>

The second event characterizing the modern age is the Reformation, “which by expropriating ecclesiastical and monastic possessions started the twofold process of individual expropriation and the accumulation of social wealth,”<sup>170</sup> compelling an inner alienation in man by identifying human worth with the availability of material possessions rather than our individual contributions to a common understanding. The property that had qualified the Greeks as being fitted to citizenship in a common world and the land that had permitted the worker of medieval Europe to participate in the common good was portioned out and bartered off. This expropriation affected Church and peasantry alike, and the work associated with both would be reduced to labour: deprived of family and property, workers were increasingly compelled into servile activity to obtain food and shelter.<sup>171</sup> The labour power released felt an intense desire to gain security through the

accumulation of capital. Labour generated wealth, wealth stimulated consumption and growth, and no longer limited by the bounds of either property or world, the process of wealth accumulation matched the frenzied abundance of the life-process; but such a “process can continue only provided that no worldly durability and stability is permitted to interfere, only as long as all worldly things, all end products of the production process, are fed back into it at an ever-increasing speed.”<sup>172</sup>

A second consequence followed, and this was the beginning of the first truly social class. No longer able to rely on fealty, Church, or charity, the worker-become-labourer had to purchase protection and belonging through membership in a class that was neither private nor public:<sup>173</sup> society emerges from the vacuum of property and distinction, and it governs its constituent populations through laws imitating the intimacy of the private sphere. Such laws are the only means by which the self-interest of individuals lacking a common understanding can be turned towards popular concerns.<sup>174</sup> But while society elevates the processes of the private sphere over those of the public, it fails to provide us with a tangible place of our own,<sup>175</sup> and the “rise of society brought about the simultaneous decline of the public as well as the private realm.”<sup>176</sup> Worldliness was sacrificed to feed the biological processes of labouring society.

But while the exploration of the globe and the Reformation laid the foundation for the alienation of humanity from both world and Earth, neither event was to be as catastrophic for the authority of cosmological understanding as was the invention of the telescope. The telescope provided a demonstrable proof that the Earth revolved around the Sun: empirical science had dethroned the notion of an ordered cosmos, and in doing so advanced a scepticism challenging all prior teleological understanding.<sup>177</sup> The natural sciences, which had focused on the contemplation and observation of truth in relation to a fixed and knowable world, were replaced by positive sciences that considered all truths to be information relative to the position of the

observer.<sup>178</sup> We no longer inhabited an intelligible world circled by the Sun, but were left isolated on a confusing planet circling a star. Beyond that, our senses were shown to be wholly unreliable, and divorced from the environment, our identities, and finally, our own senses, we suffered a crisis of faith in the very notion of understanding.

The initial refutation of the cosmos was confined to scientists and learned men, but the nature of the newly emerging society was the proliferation of all things to all people. Within a span of two decades, the masses would be exposed to over two centuries of accumulated scientific proofs,<sup>179</sup> proofs that only confirmed that neither philosophy nor perception could be trusted to provide information as accurate as that supplied by technology. The ensuing scepticism was best captured by Descartes, whose system of thought is predicated on the idea that because we cannot know anything absolutely, we can only rely on our own thoughts.<sup>180</sup> Contemplation turned to introspection,<sup>181</sup> and in our removal from the reception of certainty we were compelled to confirm our existence by reference to our internal processes.<sup>182</sup> Doubt became the basis of understanding, and this elevation of scepticism to the role of virtue explains why the “new, modern philosophy turned with such vehemence—in fact with a violence bordering on hatred—against tradition, making short shrift of the enthusiastic Renaissance revival and rediscovery of antiquity.”<sup>183</sup> The newly emerged abstract sciences sought to annihilate the evidence of their own origins.

These were the conditions that had to pertain in order for the paradigms of the modern consumer society to have succeeded its predecessors, and thus are the particular events by which those paradigms gained authority. The public sphere suffered a long decline owing to the rise of the worker's morality, and utilitarianism denied the qualification of people's deeds according to timeless standards. What was important was the completion of projects, the production of objects for sale or display, and the proliferation of useful instruments.<sup>184</sup> Contemplation was rendered down to an inert

silence and action was displaced by work, making productivity equal to the doing of great deeds. Neither philosopher nor artist could rely on their being recognized for their contributions towards the knowledge or celebration of meaningful activity, and both were instead expected to prove their usefulness through intellectual labour and the fabrication of goods.<sup>185</sup>

### **6.3 From Spirit to Crisis: the Arts of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment**

Yet the events that created the modern age are not the modern age itself, and the world-alienation so characteristic of our age had not yet appeared in full. It would take centuries for the full import of these events to be made apparent.<sup>186</sup> World-alienation was rather in the process of formation, and the agents through which its origins were developed had intended that the opposite would occur. The discoverers of the globe had not set out to shrink it to a table of contents, they had sought to expand the horizons of human experience;<sup>187</sup> the Reformation did not intend to diminish the spiritual significance of human endeavour, but had rather wanted to restore the spiritual purity of the Christian faith;<sup>188</sup> and Galileo had not challenged geocentrism in order to abolish cosmological beliefs, he was engaged in the pursuit of the “age-old desire of astronomers for simplicity, harmony, and beauty.”<sup>189</sup> The Renaissance was conceived in the copenetration of pagan and Christian values. It was a period of *transition* between overarching metaphors. The arts of the Renaissance reflect perfectly the conflict of intentions just described.<sup>XIII</sup>

The Renaissance begins in Northern Europe and was enabled through the emerging cosmopolitanism of the 14th and 15th centuries to spread to Italy where it found its greatest development. The medieval emphasis on productivity had established a middle class whose claims to authority were not founded on birthright, but on personal achievement and the accumulation of

XIII The Renaissance unfolds throughout Europe from the 14th to the 17th centuries; the Age of Discovery occurs from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 18th centuries, the Reformation between the 15th and 16th centuries and geocentrism is first challenged in the early 16th century. The timelines offered by Arendt and Darby are in agreement.

wealth. This new middle class provided the impetus for the scholarly, literary, and artistic flourishing that initiated the Renaissance. Further, the Church experienced a series of crises, and while Christianity retained importance, the Church's interpretations were no longer taken for granted.<sup>190</sup> The arts and philosophies of antiquity were revived and the private revelations of medieval scholasticism were supplemented by Greek philosophy,<sup>191</sup> with its public recognition of individual actions. The renewal of such recognition was likely encouraged by the political, military, and spiritual conflicts occurring throughout Europe during this period.<sup>XIV</sup> The patronage “of the arts [became] an important public activity with political overtones.”<sup>192</sup> Similarly, the scientific discoveries of this era affected the entire continent, and artists sought to incorporate the sciences into the arts.<sup>193</sup> In their emphasis on creative genius and the human form, the artists of the Renaissance held that divinity was to be found in the works and forms of humankind itself.<sup>194</sup>

The initial optimism of the Renaissance cannot be overemphasized. Sheer ebullience characterizes the early centuries of this climactic rebirth, and it is very well captured in the works of Giorgio Vasari. Educated in Florence, Vasari was both student and friend to Michelangelo before becoming an art student in Rome in 1529.<sup>195</sup> He was both a painter and an architect, and helped in the erection of several important buildings of the time such as *Basilica of Our Lady of Humility* in Pistoria. His *Lives of the Artists* was first published in 1550 and presents what is perhaps the first known instance of what we would recognize as art history. Bondanella goes so far as to suggest that it “would not be overestimating [Vasari's] achievement to state that [he] virtually invented the discipline of art history.”<sup>196</sup> Vasari's views – biases for Florentine art notwithstanding – are generally acknowledged to be intelligent and authoritative. Indeed, Vasari was one of the first known writers to refer to the period as a renaissance, and the very name has become synonymous with his own efforts.

XIV The Renaissance was a period rife with war, and its arts clearly reflect this. Weatherford suggests that the Renaissance itself could not have existed without war, for the cosmopolitanism of the era was fuelled in large part by refugees fleeing the armies of Genghis Khan.

Vasari held that art “was tied to the project of using perspectives to create ever convincing illusions of reality,”<sup>197</sup> meaning that he believed the arts were to be developed with a view to the imitation of nature, a belief common to his time. But Vasari's understanding was not limited to that radical formalism described earlier; realism in painting was to be made subordinate to the overarching prerogative of the painter,<sup>198</sup> this being creation of *istoria* or the facilitation of a “story in paint.”<sup>XV</sup> In this sense, his advice is for the painter to learn from the poets so that their work could better move the souls of their audiences.<sup>199</sup> We then find some agreement with Vasari's repeated assertions that fine paintings should be infused with a living vitality. Believing that the artists of his day had accomplished this, Vasari argues that the arts could not be developed any further. Nor was Vasari particularly troubled by such an occurrence, for he believed that the completion of art was a culmination of principles rather than a termination of practises.<sup>200</sup> Like Aristotle, Vasari is really predicting the completion of art rather than its death, and he believed that freed from the obligations of advancing the technical aspects of the craft, artists would be more free to pursue their own ends.

While Vasari suggests that the preeminent mediums of the Renaissance were sculpture and painting,<sup>201</sup> I would emphasize the latter. In the first instance, improved materials granted painters the ability to capture the nuances of shade and colour in manners that would have been impossible for their forebears. Secondly, breakthroughs in perspective gave the paintings of the Renaissance depths and magnitudes that are completely absent from the paintings of the Greeks, the Romans, or the medieval Christians. Thirdly, we can note that painting throughout this period was often used to provide common narratives or uniting themes by which other arts were to be coordinated or harmonized. Space was made in architecture specifically for the showcasing of painted works,

XV This characterization of *istoria* is given by Leon Battista Alberti in his *On Painting* (1956), p.70. However it is in perfect agreement with the understanding of *istoria* common to the Renaissance. (Harris, 33)

sculptures were used as frames or impromptu guides, and music was frequently written for the express purpose of facilitating observation. Finally, the memetic correlations speak for themselves: ask someone about the Renaissance and chances are high that they will recall a painting from that period. The paintings and accomplishments of the Renaissance are practically synonymous in the public imagination.

Early Northern Renaissance artworks are among the most overtly pious of the period, but they nevertheless reflect a growing tendency towards humanism. Jan van Eyck's *Double Portrait*<sup>202</sup> shows a couple being married in accordance with Christian tradition, but they are depicted with startling realism and the legal implications of this painting are at least as important as the religious.<sup>203</sup> Even paintings like Rogier van der Weyden's *Deposition*,<sup>204</sup> showing the deposition of Christ, focused on the portrayal of the individual efforts of mortal men at least as much as they did the acts of saints or holy figures.<sup>205</sup> Early Renaissance works such as *The Battle of San Romano*<sup>206</sup> utilized linear perspectives derived from mathematical principles to establish a level of depth unavailable to earlier periods.<sup>207</sup> Indeed, the incorporation of a grid allowed the creation of a mathematical scale of control over the depicted environment, and the Renaissance marks the first true use of subjective perspective.<sup>208</sup> Architecture also benefited, and artists were able to give frescoes a depth that immersed the observer into the work.<sup>209</sup>

However, it is the works of the Italian Renaissance that most clearly embody the spirit of the time. Donatello's *David*<sup>210</sup> is the first life-sized male nude to be done in bronze, and while the work survives as a remembrance of the period, little is known about the circumstances of its creation. The piece portrays a Christian narrative, but draws on the heroic forms of antiquity; as he strides over Goliath's head David's youthful face appears “to have lost interest in warfare and now seems to be retreating into his dreams.”<sup>211</sup> Raphael's *School of Athens*<sup>212</sup> is emblematic of the later High

Renaissance. The painting is a harmonious masterpiece whose “dynamic unity is an expression of the High Renaissance style,”<sup>213</sup> made possible through the combination of literature, science, and art. It shows the ideals of the Renaissance papacy through a direct appeal to the traditions of ancient Greece, and its dynamic harmony of perspective, colour, and shape is only made possible through a synthesis of the arts and sciences. Science was even used to determine the optimal measurements of human form, and da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*<sup>214</sup> is as much a mathematical enquiry as it is an attempt to scientifically improve upon classical Greek notions of ideal proportions. And nowhere is the Renaissance conception of man more famously portrayed than in Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*.<sup>215</sup> Here, Adam is situated in a realm of images, he has been rendered with absolute realism, and his posture echoes that of the God giving him life: in thought, form, and deed, man is shown to be an embodiment of the divine.<sup>216</sup>

But just as the actions of those who ushered in the modern age carried consequences they neither foresaw nor intended, so too were the giant strides of the Renaissance revealed to take place on feats of clay. In lieu of a common interpretation of Christian faith,<sup>217</sup> the ritual significance of Renaissance art was preserved in the development of a “secular cult of beauty”<sup>218</sup> that would eventually come to emphasize the execution of a work over its purported meaning. This emphasis of aesthetics over understanding culminated in the romantic worship of appearance seen in Mannerism, a style marked by ironic intent and grotesque imagery. Parmagianino's *Madonna With the Long Neck*<sup>219</sup> identifies the style. Here, the Madonna is “calm but strangely unsettling,” the baby Jesus is draped in her arms like a thing long dead, and the the work sacrifices common conceptions of faith in exchange for a “strange appeal to aesthetic”<sup>220</sup> enjoyment. Other pieces like Bronzino's *Allegory with Venus and Cupid*<sup>221</sup> are rife with idiosyncrasies and laden with symbols that are both scandalous and ambiguous. For the Mannerists at least, the aesthetics of disfigurement had become more important than the beatific representation of nature or history.

The Reformation occurs less than two decades after Bronzino's *Allegory*, and artists could no longer count on the sponsorship of religious patrons. They instead had to travel far and wide for new clients, and under threat from the violence of iconoclasm,<sup>XVI</sup> they turned to the representation of secular subjects conventional enough to guarantee their safety and a steady income. Removed from cosmology and turned to the sensational, the Renaissance "was the first to fall victim to the modern age's triumphal world alienation,"<sup>222</sup> and from its ashes arose the lamentations of the Baroque.

Like their counterparts in the Reformation, the artists of the Baroque period explicitly sought to bring the divine back into the everyday,<sup>223</sup> but such efforts went unrewarded and they were compelled to market their services to merchants. Consequently, the Baroque did not capture historic events but rather excelled in portraiture. When Baroque artists were granted the freedom to celebrate the gods, their efforts reveal the crisis of spirit experienced by those who had succumbed to the Cartesian doubt. Caravaggio's *Bacchus*<sup>224</sup> presents to us the god of Dionysian creativity rendered as an insolent pretender who is not so much divine as he is self-satisfied. Even the lighting is different: compare the pastoral environment of works such as Raphael's *Small Cowper Madonna*<sup>225</sup> against the tenebrist backdrop<sup>XVII</sup> of nominally pious Baroque works such as Caravaggio's *The Calling of St. Matthew*.<sup>226</sup> Ideals of natural beauty were slowly replaced by a preference for masterful artifice.

#### 6.4 Early Modernity: The Hydraulic-Pneumatic Metaphor

The Mechanical Metaphor passes into the Hydraulic-Pneumatic Metaphor, which is most

XVI The advocates of the Reformation were forced to confront the significance carried in the aura of religious artworks; in keeping with their own prerogatives of the annihilation of the Church, it was considered safer to destroy the remembrance shown by such works rather than trying to reappropriate them. S3e, 579

XVII Tenebrism is "an *exaggerated and theatrical type* of chiaroscuro where selected forms emerge strongly

comprehensively seen in the symbol of the engine. This metaphor comes to prominence in the periods between Hegel's phenomenology and Marx's manifesto,<sup>227</sup> which is to say between the early to late 1800s. Like its predecessor, the Hydraulic-Pneumatic Metaphor is symbolized by the storage and release of energy, but the Hydraulic-Pneumatic Metaphor is able to circumvent the impediments of friction and inertia. A mechanical device such as a clock stores a certain amount of kinetic energy which is determined by the size and complexity of the device at hand, with friction occurring between elements, and inertia being the end result: clocks wind down. But a pneumatic device such as a steam engine not only stores energy, it compresses it, and is able to do so with fewer working components than a mechanical device. The employment of hydraulics or pneumatics then permits the reduction of friction, and overcomes inertia through the storage and direction of concentrated energies. In short, hydraulic technology surmounts the obstacles presented in simply mechanical technology, and its growing presence in the developing society lead to the corresponding adoption of the engine as an Overarching Metaphor.

Thus, this Age is the one where human activity is conceived of as competing concentrations of pressure. Economic, military, and social movements are described by this metaphor in terms of the pressure they can bring to bear upon other objects and forces. But the Hydraulic-Pneumatic Metaphor faces its own inefficiencies. Specifically, hydraulic-pneumatic devices require constant maintenance and regulation: too little pressure and the engine doesn't run, too much pressure and it explodes. The concentration and direction of humans as pressure demanded that people be regulated through the gradual homogenization of human activity, and this in turn necessitated the ascent of the social sciences. The political expression of the Hydraulic-Pneumatic Metaphor is therefore the bureaucracy,<sup>228</sup> and a functioning bureaucracy is only possible in an age where people can be reduced to variables based on the very finite possibilities of their essential life-processes. This in turn meant that the work standard advocated by Enlightenment thinkers would itself be highlighted from a pervasively dark background." (Stokstad, 4e, 379, emphasis added)

made subordinate to the life-processes of labour.

Abjuring the *vita contemplativa* and wed to utilitarian ends, it was inevitable that the processes of work would be made subordinate to other ends. Having overthrown teleological certainty, the scientists of the Enlightenment carried out their own work by way of the experimental method, which is itself a reflection of the belief that the only things that can be known are those that can be isolated and manipulated under controlled conditions. But whatever might be said of its productive value, the experimental method is inherently self-involved. Like technology, its reference points are intrinsic rather than exogenous, and the experimental process circumscribes any variable it cannot control.<sup>229</sup> Scientific discovery became incidental to the collection of information, and ongoing research became the end of work as practised by those who lead the charge into modernity. Process replaced production,<sup>230</sup> and work was robbed of the standards of discipline by which the now neglected final object was to be evaluated. The work of science became the labour of the lab, and as with the new prophets of the modern age, so too with the society that depended on them for answers; society ceased to be an assembly of functionally differentiated pieces, and was now perceived as an integrated system of like-minded pressures.

## **6.5 Schism: The Arts and Sciences of the Hydraulic Age**

Initially, it was not at all apparent that the sciences would have their creative hegemony threatened. Daguerre and Talbot simultaneously invented the camera in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the implications of which were immediately apparent to artist, layman, and scientist alike: the camera stores images in a chemical medium intended to be reproduced *ad infinitum*, and its mode of operation annihilates the possibility of material authenticity. The camera is predicated on the mechanized reproduction of images, and it is patently absurd to speak of an original print. Earlier

periods had of course been able to reproduce artworks, but such reproduction was slow and required great skill. Further, “photography promises a kind of factuality that we do not expect from painting,”<sup>231</sup> and just as technology eventually came to replace sense-certainty in scientific endeavours, so too did it threaten to become a substitute for imagination in the arts. In short, photography was to art what the telescope was to philosophy, and its existence threatened to subsume the efforts of the artists into the spheres of science and technology.

The arts of the Hydraulic age express themselves in the artistic community as a series of conflicting movements arising throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and mid-19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Compelled to understand themselves according to the symbols of the engine, artists interested in advancing their discipline no longer built upon the developments of prior generations, but were rather driven to pursue increasingly novel forms of art by exploding the antiquated notions of their predecessors and colleagues. In addition to this, artists could no longer defend their authority by reference to their skill at imitation: the advent of the newly developed virtual medium of film ensured that any paying member of society could gain access to a depth of realism surpassing all but the greatest of the old masters. Thus, many artistic movements of the day sought to reduce discipline, and to embrace the sensuality that they claimed only artists could produce. Inspirational theories abound during this period, and almost all schools are characterized by their worship of subjective experience.

Impressionism arose as a response to the brief Neoclassical revival of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its “fast, open brush strokes and unfinished look”<sup>232</sup> were a direct challenge to the Academies of the day, and the works of artists such as Renoir are vague, dynamic, and intended to be “removed from the real world.”<sup>233</sup> The Post-Impressionists would in turn confront the Impressionists while delving deeper into self-expressionist tendencies. Munch's *Scream*<sup>234</sup> is executed in brushstrokes reminiscent of rising vapours, and presents to its viewers an “unforgettable image of modern

alienation”<sup>235</sup> through a representation of the artist's own fears. The Modernists of the early 1900s went further, charging that traditional concepts had lost all relevance. Modernism held mythology and tradition in disdain, and sought to show individuals, cultures and concepts alike as abstract shapes and sensory appeals. Early Modernist works such as Kandinsky's *Improvisation 28*<sup>236</sup> explicitly sought to eliminate objective representation altogether: such art was not meant to be objectively comprehended by the mind, but was rather intended to be apprehended through the gut.

Late Modernism produced the influential figure of Picasso, whose Cubism attempted to represent objects in space from multiple perspectives simultaneously. Analytic Cubism in particular tried to replicate the process and structures of perception itself, treating the process of observation as a modular construction. Cubism polarized artists: on the one hand it was eagerly picked up by the Italian Futurists who believed in militant nationalism and saw in Cubism the “speed, energy, and power of modern urban life.”<sup>237</sup> Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*<sup>238</sup> is a sculpture rendered as animate and expresses force in motion. Boccioni would further embrace the nationalist Futurist manifesto by enlisting in Italy's army during World War I, where he died in combat.<sup>XVIII</sup>

On the other hand, the abstractions of Modernism and the realities of industrialized warfare would inspire the Dadaists to deconstruct all artistic and political values through ridicule and mischief. Dada is serious play. Hugo Ball's sound poem *Karawane*<sup>239</sup> consisted entirely of nonsense sounds which were recited with great pomp and circumstance. Yet the poem has no inherent meaning and was intended to show the deprecation of language in modern discourse: one might just as well try and decipher the droning of bees. Duchamp's readymades included such notorious works as *Fountain*,<sup>240</sup> a urinal turned upside down. This work required no discipline or

XVIII The Futurists were one of the last major art movements to embrace war. Since WWI, most art movements have tended to be deeply critical of violence in general, barring the exceptions of film and totalitarian propaganda.

material beyond that found in a store or a parking lot, and its role as an artwork is entirely reliant upon its selection as such by its creator and whatever audience accepts this explanation. Of course, this epistemic confusion had been Duchamp's intention all along.

Marcel Duchamp has the somewhat unique privilege of being credited with being both cause and cure to the perceived loss of spirit in the modern arts. As the effective founder of Dada, Duchamp's work is frivolous, irreverent, and even decadent. Yet Duchamp was not attempting to kill art, he was rather trying to encourage the revival and redemption of its meaning. Duchamp's overriding concern was that the modern arts had devoted themselves wholly to the depiction of unintelligible sense-objects and had therefore forsaken their natural prerogative of thought: Dadaism was a movement predicated on the belief that modern art was a suicide of the spirit.<sup>241</sup> It is for this reason that he challenged the institutions of his time, which largely ascribed to the institutional theory of art: that art is whatever a group of experts identifies as such. Works like *Fountain* and *L.H.O.O.Q* were never intended to be great art, but it had been hoped that they would inspire good philosophy. At the same time, and in spite of the contemporary trend towards the depiction of Duchamp as an avant-garde, he tells us that the notion of progress in the arts is “merely an enormous pretension on our part”<sup>242</sup> and asks for a return to the mindfulness of prior periods.

Despite this emphasis of the mind, Duchamp himself eschewed the expressionism he has been so frequently charged with. His *Nude Descending a Staircase*, whose principal character is captured as a series of static images with nothing more than a line for a head, was crafted with great care and forethought.<sup>243</sup> Similarly, his *Bride Stripped Bare by the Shoulders, Even* has the appearance of a frivolous example of early installation art, yet its prototypes were the result of several years of planning and dozens of pages of concept sketches.<sup>XIX</sup> Both works underscore Duchamp's great insight: that art is at its freest when permitted to roam, yet remains at the service of

XIX See especially *The Bride's Veil*, by Marcel Duchamp.

thought. Art, like either play or philosophy, is autotelic, and it is most at home with itself when in the form of structured spontaneity. Dada is an honest game, and one that was intended to invite its participants into a questioning of their immediate realities while simultaneously recovering the philosophic grounds to which Duchamp believed art owed its genesis and purpose.<sup>244</sup>

The Dadaists were ultimately unsuccessful in their attempts to depoliticize human activity, but their intense distaste for violence and objective evaluation would be resumed after World War II by the Surrealists. Surrealism consisted of introspective enquiry into the unconscious impulses underlying human choice through the portrayal of fantastic dreamscapes and biological imagery. Their explicit goal was to confront the idea that "if neither the senses nor common sense nor reason can be trusted, then it may well be that all we take for reality is only a dream."<sup>245</sup> Works such as Dali's *Persistence of Memory*<sup>246</sup> are at once both descriptively realistic and substantively fictive, and in their efforts to create a virtual reality the Surrealists were heralds of the onset of the Overarching Metaphor of our own age. It is not by accident that Kojève and Arendt, two writers whose interpretations of history could not be more starkly contrasted with each other, have both described the coming age in terms of gods and animals.

## **6.6 Modernity: The Electromagnetic Metaphor**

The symbols by which we interpret our times are neither mechanical nor hydraulic, but are rather those of the electromagnetic. The Electromagnetic Metaphor attains precedence following the collapse of the USSR in 1991. While there had been indicators of the age to come as early as the late 1800s, it did not feature prominently in popular culture until the early 1900s; it is not until the collapse of the USSR that the Hydraulic-Pneumatic Metaphor ceased to be a valid means of accounting for underlying concerns. The existence of the USSR meant that the principles

of regulated social pressures appeared legitimate until such time as that state's government came to a crashing halt. Said again, the failings of centralized aggregates of pressure were not made clear until the collapse of the single largest central bureaucracy that had ever existed. In the aftermath of the collapse of the USSR, the Electromagnetic Metaphor seemed perfectly suited for symbolizing the realities of a technologically advanced post-Soviet world.

The computer provides the symbol under which the principles of the Electromagnetic Metaphor are currently collected. A computer does not measure things in terms of structural complexity or stored pressures, nor does it suffer the impairments of friction, inertia, or volatility. Computers rely on the electrical transmission or translation of disparate pieces of data, which are then gathered and homogenized in terms of binary code. Electromagnetism is a near-perfect expression of the principles of technology described earlier. It is efficient insofar as it can effectively negate both time and space through its intense speed, and its use in a computer means that power is now measured in terms of speed and relation rather than motion or force. But this power is also invisible, and where prior technologies had always had observable processes, the computer reveals no such operation<sup>247</sup> as one cannot see electronic transmission. This metaphor then necessitates a radical transformation in political and social understandings. Power is seen as increasingly decentralized, borders are treated as increasingly permeable,<sup>248</sup> and reality is increasingly expected to take place under second-order conditions.

But what does this mean for the *vita activa*? The concentration of pressure that marked the Hydraulic-Pneumatic period demanded the gradual homogenization of human activity, and this in turn both encouraged and necessitated the ascent of the social sciences. At the same time, work processes had been redirected to an understanding of the sensations of the subject, and these sensations were to be reckoned in terms of pleasure and pain. Authority, discipline, and obligation

came to be seen as inconvenient contrivances. The paramount value of the labouring society is neither creativity nor productivity, but the maintenance of life through the accumulation of pleasure and capital, and this occurs at a pace dictated by the same technologies that made such consumption possible in the first place. Consequently, "every activity which is not necessary either for the life of the individual or for the life process of society is subsumed under playfulness,"<sup>249</sup> and the *animal laborans* of a modern consumer society believes the principles of labour to be the only concepts worthy of serious thought.

The adoption of personal satisfaction as a standard may seem antithetical to the assumption of a technological paradigm, but two observations demonstrate that they are very much related. Firstly, pleasure and pain are binary states shared by every organism on earth, and are therefore a homogenizing principle. Secondly, tastes vary radically between people, leading to a seeming disparity between individuals with regards to personal preferences. Subsequently, the labouring society comes to host a near-infinite variety of particular preferences, and these are in turn evaluated according to universal and binary propositions of pleasure and pain. Added to this is the total subjectivity offered by technology by way of the virtual medium: where the Cartesian doubt had initially lead to the embrace of subjective experience, it now culminates in the complete removal of the individual from objective imposition, including the administrations of centralized authorities. Contemporary society, obsessed as it is with the satisfaction of personally identified prerogatives, is a direct reflection of the principles of the Electromagnetic Metaphor.

## **7 Virtual Reality in an Aesthetic Society**

It would, however, be a grave miscalculation to assume that the obsession with personal satisfaction is limited to a pursuit of novelty, or that the consumer's ethos comprises some necessary

final point in the historical development of the West. Rather, it appears likely that consumerism<sup>XX</sup> is giving way to aestheticism, and it is my argument that we are now inhabiting an aesthetic society that could not have existed as such at any other point of history. Nor should this be taken as an indicator of superficiality, but it must rather be understood as a saving grace: as Marshal McLuhan advised, it is in the arts that individuals might find solace and protection from the instrumentalizing tendencies of science and technology. This is a fitting development, for it has always been the case that where the sciences subordinate, aesthetics coordinates;<sup>250</sup> where technology reduces all participants to users and variables, the beauties of art immerse us in a world of common understanding that can be easily shared and made known to others. Put otherwise, the celebratory nature of the arts ensures that audiences can establish shared cultures, albeit temporarily, despite living in a society that disavows the imposition of any such structures of identity.

This is to recall Hegel's proposal for spiritual progress, which begins with aesthetics and later grows into religion and philosophy. Humankind's *pursuit* of aesthetics reflects our inherent desire to participate in higher meanings; our *acceptance* of aesthetic arguments is owed to the arts being grounded in the truly universal conditions of sense and thought; but our *reliance* on imagery, media, and presentation is the consequence of our having abandoned the notion of shared evaluative standards. Above all, an aesthetic society represents and perpetuates the revival of a mytho-magical account of causality. The return to images described so often throughout the literature could only take place at a time when we have reached a pinnacle of reason, yet are simultaneously prepared to accept an account of the world that emphasizes the invisible, the symbolic, or the *magical*. And it is precisely this account of causality that exists under the Electromagnetic Metaphor. We stand at a crossroads where identity is realized in technology but it is determined by aesthetics, and in its capacity as an identifier of human prerogatives, aesthetics has come to be a basis for political and

XX This is not to understate the widespread existence of consumerism. In terms of economy, consumerism is simply the purest expression of the principles of business and so it will remain for as long as businesses do. In terms of politics, capital-seeking behaviour will continue for as long as liberal-democracies seek international expression. And historically, we are only just transitioning; consumerism has lasted for generations, and remains prominent.

social action. But to make these claims is to demand a demonstration of the differences between the labouring consumer and the playful aesthete, which are anything but obvious.

## 7.1 From Consumer to Aesthete: The Release and Proliferation of Art

Arendt has rightly showed labouring consumerism to be definitive of the spirit of much of modernity. The Cold War was the direct consequence of the wholesale embrace of the values of the *animal laborans*. Whether Communist or capitalist, whether Russian, Chinese, Canadian, or American, the rhetoric and actions of most nation-states were explicitly spoken of in terms of either labour or consumption throughout the larger part of the past two centuries. The 1980s were particularly notable, as the better part of two decades manifested its values in a paroxysm of gluttony. Subsequently, the arts between the peak of the Cold War through the end of the century emphasized consumerism: in at least one case this celebration of consumer society was carried out with an explicit view to the political and social entrenchment of American values, and it is notable that one of the largest sponsors of Jackson Pollock's work was the CIA.<sup>XXI</sup>

The principles of consumer society are most clearly captured in Pop art, which is the open celebration of the comforts and luxuries of a modern society: Pop art embraces nihilism, irony, and consumer goods. Its material is found in the reproduction of “cheap and plentiful material goods” while its pantheon consists of “American mass media and commercial culture.”<sup>251</sup> Where Michelangelo created an Adam endowed with the divine gifts of natality and reason, Richard Hamilton's *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Appealing*<sup>252</sup> offers us an Adam and Eve<sup>XXII</sup> gifted with lollipops and jazz. But the prophet of Pop was Andy Warhol, and his *Marilyn Diptych*<sup>253</sup> is technological all the way through. Made in a shop called The Factory using an

XXI The CIA funded Pollock with the belief that his self-expressionism would act as a deterrent to the implementation of community values, which were perceived as benefitting Communism over capitalism.

XXII Richard Hamilton in fact referred to the two people in this work as his own Adam and Eve.

assembly-line technique, the diptych transforms a dead celebrity into a latter day saint.

However, it might well be argued that in something like the *Marilyn Diptych* Warhol did not achieve anything too radical. Actors and actresses have proved to be popular figures for other artists, and from those periods that we are generally inclined to treat as markedly authentic.<sup>XXIII</sup> A far more challenging work with regards to the understanding of art in the modern era is seen in Warhol's *Brillo Box*, the simplicity of which proves to be quite deceptive. A very early example of installation art, *Brillo Box* presents to its viewers an over-sized replica of the commercial product of the same name; that is all it gives them, and a casual observer is hard pressed to state what differences could possibly exist that distinguish the ostensible work of art from the commodity. In short, it takes a great deal of thought or one of Hume's critics to explain whether *Brillo Box* is something possessed of great insight or is only a very clear example of charlatanry in art.

Arthur Danto has written extensively on the significance of works like Duchamp's *Fountain* and Warhol's *Brillo Box*, both of which he considers to be representative of the death of art in its highest vocation: his use of the term is explicitly informed by Hegel. Danto is also in agreement with Duchamp in arguing that art is something “in service to the mind,”<sup>254</sup> and that reaches its spiritual culmination in philosophic understanding.<sup>255</sup> He points to works such as Duchamp's own *Fountain* or Warhol's *Brillo Box* as indicative of a transition in the modern arts towards the uncovering of the very essence of art itself.<sup>256</sup> Yet, neither of these works could be said to have met any classical definition of the beautiful or the ideal. Consequently, Danto argues that the arts reached their essential form when they abandoned the aesthetic *qua* appearance, and turned instead to the pursuit of the aesthetic *qua* philosophic understanding.<sup>257</sup>

All this is to say that works such as Duchamp's *Fountain* or Warhol's *Brillo Box* – in short,  
XXIII Consider Degas' ballerinas, or Plato's inclusion of the playwright Aristophanes in the *Symposium*.

the entire oeuvre of modernity – are intended to above all ask the question: What is art? And Danto argues that this question can itself only arise at a time when the arts have reached their end. The question of what art is or ought to be requires philosophy, but this elevation brings with it a removal, and art attains its essential end only by abandoning its highest vocation.<sup>258</sup> In other words, art abandons its support of common narratives, turns itself instead to the exercise of thought, and in the provocation of enquiry it loses its former authority of mythic significance. Yet Danto sees in this death a liberating element. Removed from narrative, art is similarly freed from the strictures of canon, discipline, or formal quality. Artists no longer have to be concerned with advancing a particular style, nor are they expected to conform to the expectations of any given school.<sup>259</sup> Rather, Danto suggests that modern artists are now freed from the grand narratives of the past,<sup>260</sup> a reality that carries with it the double-edged condition of being free from expectation.

There is another insight to be derived from Danto's considerations of Pop and installation art, and that is to recognize how thoroughly the works of art have been implemented throughout our civilization. Danto provides an example worth recounting here. Walking past a site under construction, it suddenly occurred to him that he had no way of knowing whether he was walking past an installation piece or not. He could easily have confirmed it with some minor investigation, perhaps by asking a foreman (or performer) whether this was really a construction site, but the point remains: he was now living in a society in which the arts were both technologically and socially enabled to affect an approximation of virtually any imaginable sense-experience anywhere, at almost any time. Likewise, in researching the history of something like *Brillo Box*, Danto discovered that the original design for the actual product had been drafted by James Harvey, a well-educated artist of some long experience.<sup>261</sup> This lead him to conclude that the arts have become so ingrained into our culture that the simplest daily experiences involve our interaction with myriad works of art, none of which are acknowledged or treated as such owing to their being affiliated with

consumer goods. This is to say that Danto concluded that the arts had become decentralized, mobile, and were thereby enabled to saturate almost all modern environments.

Danto's notes on installation art proved to be quite prophetic. Rising to prominence in the early 1990s, installation arts are now implemented almost daily throughout a multitude of states. Simultaneously challenged and disturbed by the rise of consumer culture and the developments of virtual media, artists used new techniques to “connect with their media-saturated culture,”<sup>262</sup> and as technology is made increasingly easy to transport and operate, so it is with installation art. It is no longer restricted to museums or galleries, nor do installations require workshops or studios. They can be made within hours, anywhere. And, as Danto suggests, it is not always apparent to the participants that they are in fact taking part in an artwork. In October of 2011, the *Shadowing* installation was put in place in Bristol, UK.<sup>263</sup> This installation used an infrared camera to capture people's motions as silhouettes that were projected onto the street. The intent of the installation was to enable “residents and visitors to reconfigure and rewrite [the] services, places and stories,”<sup>264</sup> of the city around them. Put otherwise, artists perceived the spiritually deleterious effects of rampant consumerism, and effectively brought it to public awareness through their use of media that was at once mobile, immersive, yet lacking profitability: installations can be participated in, discussed, or photographed, but one cannot purchase them. They rely on technology while subverting all traditional notions of efficiency and trade.

And of course, none of this is to speak of the virtual mediums, which have assumed dominance throughout the scientific, political, and artistic communities via simulation programs, 24 hour news cycles, and televisual media.<sup>265</sup> Nor are virtual mediums confined to film and cinema. Literally thousands of high-quality digital paintings exist online, and I need hardly call attention to the fact that almost all contemporary music relies on electrical mediums, whether for storage,

composition, or production. Virtual mediums are now used even in architecture, which we had earlier identified as the most tangible of the fine arts. Las Vegas' neon lights and simulated world wonders mark it as a hyper-modern city that is no longer limited to space or time in its architecture;<sup>266</sup> Dubai is laid out according to a computer-generated plan, “images born in cyberspace are superposed on the empty space of desert or sea,”<sup>267</sup> and the virtual is thereby reified.

The works of art have been so thoroughly coordinated with our underlying concerns that they are now perceived as being integral to our daily activities. Yet the common refrain has been to accuse our artists of being morally sterile or spiritually inert; such arguments reflect a vocabulary inherited from the passing age of the labourer's maxims, which confined all activities beyond subsistence to trivia. It is as if we are fish in a bowl, who, when pressed as to where one might find water, can but shrug and respond that we have no idea what that substance looks like. Nevertheless, the arts and the aesthetic pursuit of truth-through-beauty have come to form the substrate of our economic, social, and political realities.

## **7.2 Synthesis: the Arts and Sciences of an Aesthetic Age**

But in saying this, we are also seeing another kind of transition, and one that is less talked about. Throughout modernity, the arts have sought to defend their purview from the sciences while simultaneously co-opting its technologies for the exploration of new mediums. As such, laboratory labourers have increasingly found that their own efforts are being integrated into the artistic spheres. Practically speaking, the labours of scientists are hired by film studios, production companies, and the like. There is a very simple economic factor at work here. But it is additionally the case that the sciences have ceased to function as a source of common authority. This claim may seem counterintuitive in light of one's own daily experiences with popular media, but several factors

demonstrate this occurrence.

Firstly, with regards to the general population vis-a-vis scientific authority, we can note that, as Alisdair MacIntyre points out, value-neutral facts are a necessary but insufficient foundation for social or political arguments.<sup>268</sup> They are collector's items, to be traded in favour of whatever arguments one might be supporting at a given moment, and the source of the facts is generally granted more consideration than the facts themselves. This is the direct consequence of the scientist's reduction into laboratory labourer, where the abstract will is institutionalized. There is now a surfeit of information,<sup>XXIV</sup> and the hardest task facing researchers is no longer gathering data, but *sorting* it. Further, the last century has seen two monstrous wars and a host of genocides that were enabled and perpetuated via scientific communities and technological advances. Contemporary portrayals of war are markedly different from those of any other point in history, and anyone depicting a patriotic act is likely to be accused of being non-progressive, which is the liberal equivalent of heresy. This reversal of perception owes much to our firsthand experience with the extremities of the abstract will at war, and in fighting the industrialization of armed conflict, Duchamp and Dali were but heralds for the popular sentiments of our time.

Underlying this external change of relationship have been the schisms that consistently develop within the scientific communities themselves. And scientific culture must be understood as a *plurality of communities* rather than a monolith. As Kuhn writes, it is not at all evident that the sciences have enjoyed the consistently sequential development they so often present as canon.<sup>269</sup> For example, the discovery of oxygen is commonly attributed to the efforts of three people, but of these at least one can be recognized as carrying out his experiments with an explicit view towards proving phlogiston theory, and thereby *disproving* that oxygen is a gas. This is to say that while

XXIV This is a well-known problem in cyber-securities, and the explicit reason that companies and governments require third-party data-miners and aggregators. Without the use of filtering algorithms, it would be impossible to ever find the information one needs from the near-infinity of data that is available.

Joseph Priestley is commonly credited by scientific canon as a discoverer of oxygen, Priestley himself disputed the implications of his own findings. It is not until Lavoisier carries forth with his own experiments that oxygen is showed to be gaseous rather than liquid.<sup>270</sup> The difference between the two was not one of method, but one of paradigm, and Priestley could no more be attributed with the discovery of oxygen than could a Druid be credited with the invention of the clock.

The history of scientific innovation, as with all histories, is also one of conflict and revolution. The struggle for recognition surfaces anywhere people of distinction can share a public forum and some common ground; the conflicts between scientific paradigms are as furious as any other. Careers, personal fortunes, and entire paradigms are the stakes in a conflict of scientific disciplines, and it is with good reason that Arendt tells us that action is still possible, if nowhere else, in the sciences.<sup>271</sup> One calls to mind the infamous Bone wars that took place between Marsh and Cope in the late 1800s. The two paleontologists engaged in a conflict that effectively bankrupted both of them. At the end of it all, they claimed to discover a combined total of 142 distinct species of fossil, with only 32 of those identifications being valid.

The early 1930s saw the emergence of Godels' Incompleteness Theorem, which posited that the formula for a system was inseparable from the system itself, inverting the traditional paradigm of strictly objective accounts of cause and consequence. The intentions of the observer were now to be treated as a variable affecting the outcome of the observer's calculations. The rupture continues to carry repercussions even today, and is considered a seminal development in quantum physics.<sup>272</sup> Interestingly enough, the theorem was released at a time when the sciences held a relatively stable hegemony vis-a-vis the underlying concern. Popular culture was rife with "science-heroes," political parties tended to be structured along mass party lines designed to exploit the scientific principles of the engine,<sup>XXV</sup> and eugenics was a popular topic of debate in many nation-states. Yet XXVCompare the work of Krouwel (253-255) to Darby's Hydraulic-Pneumatic Metaphor already described.

the confidence of the sciences proved more akin to hubris, and, like the Church prior to Reformation, the neglect of its own stated aims lead to the allowance of an internal space from which radical positivism was successfully challenged.

In the 1950s, C.P. Snow writes his seminal *On the Two Cultures*, in which he explicitly addresses the widening gulf between the arts and sciences. At one pole of this divide are the literary intellectuals,<sup>273</sup> although we would not be remiss in including the vast majority of philosophers in this same category; at the other extreme are the scientists, and most especially the physical scientists.<sup>274</sup> This separation of knowledges is likely apparent to the reader. It must at any rate be apparent to the faculty and students of any accredited educational institute in North America: in declaring a major, the first and most essential distinction a student is asked to make is that between the arts and sciences. The scientists, for their part, are described by Snow as falling guilty of many of those things already covered in this thesis. They fail to grasp the sheer significance presented to the human mind by its appreciation of the liberal arts, and instead seek to subordinate it under instrumental reasoning. Snow summarizes it quite well when he relates the common reaction amongst scientists to his questions regarding what books they've read. Most "replied firmly and confidently: 'Books? I prefer to use my books as tools,'" to which Snow could only wonder "what sort of a tool would a book make? Perhaps a hammer? A primitive digging instrument?"<sup>275</sup>

But those of us in the liberal arts are hardly exempt from this same ignorance, and Snow proposes we may be even more guilty than our scientific counterparts. This is largely owed to the fact that many intellectuals are effectively "natural Luddites,"<sup>276</sup> by which Snow means to indicate that they are guilty of only studying those periods they have chosen to identify as meaningful. All other historical phenomenon is treated as negligible, or more commonly, as bereft of spirit or insight. Being a student of the liberal arts myself, it is hard to disagree with Snow's indictment. It

is often the case that I have run into other students who are either desperate to revive a Golden Age that never existed, or alternately seek some degree of comfort in isolating themselves to the endless rehearsal of ideas from bygone eras. There is another point, and this one is somewhat more distressing: it is that Snow suggests that of the two cultures, it is the scientists who have been most concerned with the elevation of the human condition, while the intellectuals have largely chosen to abandon any such effort under the pretence of their positing ideas too lofty for the layman to comprehend. Once again, this analysis carries a ring of truth.

In either case, Snow points out that each culture has been thereby deprived of an essential factor; adopting a Hegelian perspective, I am inclined to suggest that this mutual neglect deprives both cultures of necessary faculties of substantiation. And what Snow says of the intellectuals in this circumstance readily applies to the scientists as well. Both the arts and sciences had become tone-deaf to the orchestrations of the other, and as "with the tone-deaf, they don't know what they miss."<sup>277</sup> Snow's essay led, as these things do, to the advancement of a "third path,"<sup>278</sup> composed of those artists, scientists, or thinkers who believed it was both necessary and appropriate to bridge the divide.<sup>279</sup> Now it seems there is a growing perception that the arts and sciences need each other. If nothing else, there is an interest on the part of the general public to learn from their harmonization.

All this is to say that just as the arts were forced towards an extremity of arbitrary reasoning by the advances of technology, so too were the disciples of science drawn to an increasingly abstract position from which they were unable to support their claims of spiritual improvement. The authority formerly held by artists during antiquity was quashed by the emergence of the positive sciences; the authority of the sciences was in turn to be decimated by a growing awareness of their inability to substantiate individual identity. Further, the sciences were subordinated to the aggregating tendencies of the labouring mentality, and thereby produced an endless array of

decontextualized facts that only seemed to emphasize their utter lack of guidance. Finally, scientists themselves adopted the same attitudes of the philosophers of the Enlightenment, and were able to discredit their own histories by reference to those things that had previously been treated as contrary: just as Enlightenment thinkers turned to the subjective, so too are the unseen experiences of the subject being considered throughout many scientific fields. The consequence of this exchange has been the synthesis of the arts and sciences, with identity becoming an aesthetic prerogative, but its development left to the devices of science: we choose our individual pantheons, but share a universal regalia. Nowhere is this made clearer than in the consideration of the preeminent mediums of our time.

### **7.3 Virtual Reality: Film and Cinema**

The preeminent medium of the modern age is neither poetry nor architecture, neither painting nor music, but the virtual medium of film. It is this medium that represents the “graphic age of electronic man”<sup>280</sup> more than any other. Here, technology does not facilitate the medium, it *is* the medium, with pure light operating as its material. The utterly intangible nature of its material enables cinema to manipulate matter, space, and time itself in the creation of its objects: films are shot at separate times across disparate locations and their material is reorganized in post-production. Consequently, cinema does not rely on the acting ability of its participants in the manner that a stage play does, nor does it require the common understanding that is so integral to literature or poetry. Rather, film requires above all else good editing,<sup>281</sup> as it is the process of editing that will make of each movie a self-contained world. And as filming devices and editing techniques advance, filmmaking itself can be accomplished with less discipline. Every member of a given audience comes to believe that through editing, special effects, and access to social platforms, they can achieve the same results as professional artists.

Beyond this, cinema establishes a near-total immersion of the audience in the work being observed. The scenes of a movie blink by at a rapid pace, and events that would take a novel pages to describe can be portrayed in film as a gestalt of sights, sounds, and understanding within minutes, or even seconds. Sights and sounds make impressions upon the senses, generate emotional or cognitive responses, and are then replaced by yet another sense-impression. The multimedia content of a film thereby creates an overwhelmingly visceral reaction in its audience, and the spectator is struck by its content as if by a bullet. At the same time, the camera promises its viewers a realism that cannot be denied, and a film's "audience takes the position of the camera; its approach is that of testing"<sup>282</sup> rather than contemplation. In short, whatever "the camera turns to, the audience accepts"<sup>283</sup> as something worth noting, and anything that takes place off screen is swiftly forgotten. It is this aspect of the film, this total sensory immersion combined with the ostensible truths offered by the technology of the camera, that enables to film to effectively aestheticize any experience, up to and including both politics and death.

Benjamin and McLuhan have made several intriguing observations in this vein. Benjamin argues that film represents a fundamental transformation in the world and character of art. Because film is intended from the start to be mechanically reproduced and can be shown anywhere provided that site has access to a projector and a flat surface, Benjamin argues that the aura of art is completely displaced by cinematic works. Put otherwise, where the cultic value exhibited by the arts once owed itself to the fact that a given work was a singular object occupying a determined space that could only be viewed at certain times, the cultic value of the film is owed to the cinematic capacity for sensorial immersion. The audience of the film is thus described by him as being an absent-minded critic,<sup>284</sup> or someone who parses the content of the film for its message while accepting that message as writ. It is this capacity of film, to demand the attention of every

aspect of human perception even unto our neural and biological systems, that permitted the Nazis to employ their own studios to such great effect. The Nazis were able to aestheticize death, or to make an aesthetic appeal of violence and genocide. Likewise, Benjamin suggests that the Nazis sought the aestheticization of politics, so that politicians would effectively be actors rather than statesmen. Under such a regime the political system would run on autopilot and the people would become audiences whose attendance to electoral performances would perpetuate the apparatus of state.

Cinema has indeed proven to have this capacity for aestheticizing reality, and the sphere traditionally identified as the political has shown itself to be increasingly susceptible to aesthetic influences. McLuhan points out that the widescale derision of the rich or the alleged elite would not have been possible had it not been for the introduction of the camera as a means of accounting for daily life.<sup>285</sup> Caught on camera and exposed to the critiques of the masses, the lifestyles of the rich and famous were very soon turned to the basest modes of entertainment. Most modern citizens eagerly tune into programs whose sole purpose is to expose the idiocy of the upper classes. At the same time, riches beyond dreams of avarice are made available in at least a virtual context to those same viewing audiences by way of the magic of movies and television.

It is equally notable that the notion of the antihero does not enter the public imagination until the proliferation of cinema. While the romantic eras of other nations – perhaps most especially Russia and Germany – supplied literature with distinctly unheroic figures, the use of downright villainous protagonists was characteristic of the film studios of America. McLuhan points out that when *Lolita* hit the screens it had a far greater impact than its mere publication ever did. Whereas literature presented a multitude of books to be read in private, the film was shown at on big screens and as matinee features. The average individual, that essential building block of Western civilization, was suddenly confronted with a tale centred around an eminently flawed

figure, and we found it easier to relate to a figure whose values were in constant jeopardy than to the stalwarts of old.<sup>286</sup> Nor was the antihero limited to select movies, and the average moviegoer is far more likely to encounter a protagonist who arbitrarily determines their values than they are a hero who accepts the imposition of an objective code of honour from any external source.

The entire genre of film noir is a testament to the antihero. Humphrey Bogart's character of Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* is duplicitous, insulting, and vindictively low-brow; the audience finds solace in his pragmatism, his colloquialisms, and his utter fearlessness in the face of the ostensible elite, most amply demonstrated in the character of The Fat Man. Likewise, the character of Mike Hammer in the classic *Kiss Me Deadly* is utterly reprehensible in every way: he makes his living as a private investigator who catches wives cheating on their spouses. He then makes a double paycheck by extracting bribes from those same wives to report back to the original clients that there were no signs of infidelity. Yet Hammer is the protagonist, and we are immediately made aware of this fact by his opposition to the luxuries offered to him by his richer clients. The tradition of the antihero continues today in such excellent films as *Miller's Crossing* or *No Country For Old Men*. Indeed, even the alleged super heroes of modernity cannot escape the romantic love of irony and the tragic, and we can note that in his latest incarnation the Man of Steel is a callous, alienated individual who is willing to commit murder in the pursuit of his own vision of the truth. Through the immersion and influence of film we have accepted an abolition of moral imperatives, provided such abolition can be cast in terms of exciting narrative or thought provoking content.

In this we see another tendency of the cinematic medium, and that is the powerful homogenizing effect of virtual reality. McLuhan observes that film has likely contributed more to the spread of liberal-democracy than any number of bombs. When film first appeared in Thailand and Singapore. it gave to the people an image of the American surrounded by luxury, adventure, and

automobiles. What the camera presented, it normalized, and nations that had never sought modern conveniences suddenly expressed an overwhelming surge of entitlement to those same things.<sup>287</sup>

Cinema is a truly social medium, and one uniquely suited to the tenets of liberal-democracy. It is intended to be reproduced, recognizes everyone as an equal unit, and its immersion of the senses permits the near instantaneous alleviation of the pains of ennui. Similarly, the explicit goal of film-makers has been to construct a world capable of immersing its viewers into a totally fabricated reality. The ongoing refinement of image projection technologies combined with the proliferation of online communities centred on virtual constructs make it probable that we will have access to interactive virtual reality within our lifetimes. We will in all likelihood have yet another medium as well, a sort of combination of digital architecture, online theatre, and audience collaboration. This is the predictable direction the arts are already moving towards, the utterly intangible that, because of its intangibility, carries its observers firmly into the spheres of imagination. The filmmaker is a god of dreams, the viewer is transported through the Gates of Horn, and "immediate reality [becomes] an orchid in the land of technology."<sup>288</sup> The acceptance of film as preeminent medium can only occur in a people who wish to fetishize reality itself.

#### **7.4 Reified Myths: bioart**

McLuhan points out that when cinema was first introduced to England, its capacity for total neurological immersion was recognized in the name they gave it: Bioscopic technology merged mechanical and organic life in a new and unprecedented way. Hollywood has, for its part, been very much obsessed with the merging of biological beings and technological parts, and the bio-mechanical has become a mainstay of movies from across genres. There is H.R. Giger's infamous Xenomorph from the *Alien* franchise, the life-like replicants of *Bladerunner*, and the digitized

sapience of the victims of *The Matrix*. But what cinema presented as an allegory of the dangers of technological homogenization is now being made into a present-day reality via the efforts of the field of bioart.

The explicit goal of bioart is to help create a world where all biological nature – human and non-human alike – becomes the material for artistic creation. Its origins lie in biopunk, a movement founded on the assumption that DNA can be hacked in the same way a computer can: DNA does after all contain only four basic variables that can be further subdivided into one of two possible pairings, making it a binary code. Bioart is the obverse of the virtual medium. Where film constructs a shared virtual reality by immersing individuals in a common sensual experience, bioart promises infinite diversity in the actual world by giving each individual a new form manifested as a preference of appearance. This is art waiting to bud into political reality, art waiting to act as the ground on which an entire discourse will have to take place. Its bare existence as such has already instigated political changes, and carries with it the potential for discursive rupture. At its current stage of development, it seems to very much be a symbolic form. The works it has achieved, while radical, are recognized as being only illustrative of what might *yet* be achieved. This means that the execution of a work is incidental to the meaning or the possibilities that it represents.

Early bioart is clearly symbolic in this regard. There is the relatively well-known *Alba*, a rabbit whose DNA was successfully spliced with jellyfish genes so as to endow it with bioluminescence: Alba is a green rabbit that glows in the dark.<sup>289</sup> There is also the *Legoman*, a plastic model of a lego man over which has been grown a thin tissue that also glows in the dark. This tissue is created by splicing human and jellyfish DNA.<sup>290</sup> Or we might consider the thoroughly bizarre phenomenon of xeno-text. Here, poet-technician Christian Bok has created a viral life-form that is sensitive to electronic stimulation. When poetry is entered into a machine, translated to

binary, and transmitted to the virus, it responds by generating a protein string that can then be translated into binary, then into words. In effect, the virus acts as a callback code, and the intention was to create a "living poem"<sup>291</sup> that participants could activate through their selection of a random couplet; it is Eliot's "Wasteland," adapted to the genetic expression of a semi-living thing.

However, it seems very likely that bioart will not become popular until it reaches a classical stage of development. This will in turn require still more coordination between the arts and sciences, as well as a corresponding decrease in government regulation. Work is already being done in this vein, and the literature is well stocked in theories for human mutation. These include idealizations of form, the addition of desirable textures or patterns, and even the implementation of mimetic skin. In short, once bioart achieves the creation of works whose living existence is at least superficially that of a demi-god or beast of myth, then it will have reached a stage where its development will become synonymous with our perception of the human spirit. We will become self-enclosed cultures, with symbolic mutations being used to reconcile our sentimental contents with our preferred forms. Consider in this light the works of Stelarc, a popular bioartist with a penchant for self-surgery. Over the years, his works have included the insertion of electrical nodes into his muscles, so that observers might remotely control his actions; the grafting of an ear to his forearms to demonstrate it could be done; and a botched effort to implant something into himself that he describes as a "stomach sculpture," for which he had to be hospitalized.<sup>292</sup>

What I've just described may be considered as either far-fetched, logical, or horrifying, depending on one's historical allegiances. But what might give cause for distress more generally is the idea that bioart must at some point reach something like a romantic phase. Of course, this may have already been achieved in the grotesque play of the MEART Project. Here is one description of the MEART entity given by the project's homepage: MEART "is a geographically detached, bio-

cybernetic research and development project exploring aspects of creativity and artistry in the age of new biological technologies."<sup>293</sup> By itself, this is not too helpful however, and the radical nature of the MEART is not made clear until one peruses the material conditions of its existence.

There are two principal components of the MEART, these being its biological and cybernetic structures. Biologically speaking, the MEART is an entity grown from a culture derived from the cortical cells of embryonic rats. The resulting organic mass is suspended in a nutrient solution and grown over a multi-electrode array (MEA). This array is connected to an online communications network that allows the entity to send and receive electrical signals to and from various pieces of equipment. Cameras serve as its visual organs, while robotic arms enable it to draw and interact with the world. And so "what at first glance seems to be a confusion of cables, computers and cell cultures in a fridge is in fact a living entity,"<sup>294</sup> complete with life span, nutritional requirements, and a capacity to react to external stimuli.

But the MEART is also geographically detached. This is a reference to the spatially dissociated character of the MEART, and this dissociation occurs on several levels. Most immediately, the MEART is housed in a culturing chamber connected to various devices. The processing centre for the organism is physically disconnected from its senses as well as its appendages. And MEART is connected to the Internet, which acts as a mediator between its components. More importantly, the fact that the MEART shares remote access with its appendages and sensory organs means that its brain and body can be separated by enormous distances. Quite literally, the MEART can process information on one side of the globe and coordinate physical responses on the opposite side.<sup>295</sup> Indeed, the MEART can theoretically coordinate and share stimulus between multiple bodies, meaning that the MEART is not only geographically detached, it is also a corporeal multiplicity.

One particularly troubling reality of the MEART organism is that its creators refer to it as a singularity, yet the organisms themselves have been multiple and they die quite rapidly. There have been several instances where MEARTs have died while in exhibition, signalled by the sudden cessation of their efforts at drawing. It might be telling that while the audiences are often stunned or even distressed by this death, its creators have since come to regard it as something humorous.<sup>296</sup> Perhaps more radical is the fact that once created, the MEART's creators are then dedicated to the maintenance of their living artwork. Attendants observe its functions around the clock.<sup>297</sup> In this performance of essential biological processes, one might say that these attendants act as a sort of homeostasis, and their roles are not functionally different than are the microbes, bacteria, or organs of living bodies. There is also the matter of the intense scrutiny given to the scribbles of the entity, and it might be said that an attendant of the MEART is a sort of ethnologist-cum-cultist, wholly dedicated to the interpretation of a post-modern cargo cult of their own design.

It would be too easy to declare the MEART as a commoditization of human life. Human lives have been commoditized for many centuries, and this is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. Rather, what the MEART represents is an aestheticization of life itself. Here, the sanctity of the life-process, that defining prerogative of the *animal laborans*, is turned on its head and made subordinate to aesthetic consideration. Additionally, in presenting the MEART as an artist and according to the norms and logics associated with the arts, the project challenges audiences to recognize it in terms we have traditionally considered to be distinctly human. To be sure, speakers at MEART exhibitions make the obligatory references to its scientific and medical potential, but ultimately it is as an artist that the MEART is displayed to others. Audiences are asked to evaluate its work or even submit themselves to the MEART as something to be seen and drawn: they take a seat in front of the camera that operates as the eye of the entity, and in being observed they become

a subject for the MEART's next piece. This act of submitting and of being watched makes the life-process and possible intelligence of the MEART an immediate and internal consideration, and it is small wonder that reactions range from “complete disgust to complete fascination ... you probably won't find anyone who saw MEART and is kind of indifferent.”<sup>298</sup>

By presenting oneself to the entity as its subject, audiences transform themselves into evaluators of the entity's capacity for life, learning and intelligence. Every single visitor becomes an interpreter of the value of the MEART, and in making this decision they must choose, define, or challenge their preconceptions of utility, novelty, and imagination. This is also to ask: if the principles of the life-process, of its preservation, of its betterment or its regulation are the dominant logic of modern Western societies, what happens to that logic when the very concept of *life* is no longer a given? Will we move on to biosculpture, or even bioarchitecture? This is not high-blown rhetoric: bioart is here, gaining in popularity, and is even now being practised in homes by private citizens. It is one fad away from national consciousness, one trend away from being an aesthetic choice, and one step away from acceptance by society. We are fast reaching a point where the basic components of our biological selves are perceived as a canvas on which to affect radical aesthetic choices. In bioart we see the artist or subject become a magi, and private mythology is made public and concrete. We may yet see the revival of Hegel's art in its highest vocation, but we must also wonder whether we are prepared to accept it in the terms by which it will be made manifest.

## **8 Conclusion: The Progress of Art and the End of History**

Throughout this thesis I have made the following arguments: firstly, that aesthetics comprises a search or enquiry into the truth, and that this pursuit is as meaningful as those offered by religion, philosophy, and science; secondly, that a culture's understanding of arts and mediums

might therefore be considered to be quite revealing with regards to that culture's identification of itself as well as its overarching prerogatives, and is therefore representative of the spirit of that same people; and thirdly, that a politic derived from aesthetics should not be immediately relegated to the realm of symptom or coincidence, but must rather be confronted as a politic that can only exist when public authority is no longer perceived to reside in institutional, ecclesiastical, or technocratic spheres. Consequently, an observation of the preeminent mediums and the corresponding social activities of our own times reveals us to be neither labourer, nor consumer, nor even technocrat: we are become a society of aesthetes, for whom identity and political values are determined in aesthetics and realized via science and technology.

Nor could a society of aesthetes exist in terms other than this, or at least it is doubtful that aesthetic prerogatives could ever have been implemented so thoroughly at any prior time of history. Liberal-democracy proceeds from the assumption that formal or hierarchical institutions are inherently flawed and of suspect intentions. Organized religions are perceived as being irrational, coercive, and archaic. Philosophy suffered injuries during the Enlightenment and the corollary industrial and scientific revolutions from which it never fully recovered, and the constant efforts of modern bureaucracies to subordinate the once-liberal arts to the oversight of utility have been a constant source of distress ever since. And while scientific discourse remains prominent in the discussions of the day, the authoritative hegemony once enjoyed by scientific culture has been fractured from both without and within. The modern citizen still eagerly cites whatever data might present itself in support or disproof of arguments, but we are just as likely to disregard those same teachings when they are believed to violate some hitherto undiscovered aspect of our soul, or some allegedly inarticulable condition underlying our own daily lives.

In short, aesthetics becomes the only sphere capable of accommodating the simultaneous

and often incommensurable claims of progressive rationality and autonomous self-entitlement on which modern liberal-democracy is predicated. And in lieu of any other singular source of public authority, we can hardly be expected to discriminate between values using any other means than those granted us by the arts. Nowadays, one *chooses* the life and form that one wishes to have, then one seeks those channels by which that choice might be challenged or substantiated; our self-entitlement to such autonomy is inculcated into us by virtue of the freedoms promised to us in popular rhetoric and the virtual realities that are anticipated in cinema and film. As McLuhan predicted, the works of the artists have become a bulwark by which individuals preserve themselves against the homogenizing utility of technological paradigms.<sup>299</sup> Likewise, it is only in the virtual realities offered by technological proliferation that aesthetics has come to form the very real substrate of our daily lives.

From a Hegelian perspective at least, the aesthetic turn is a logical outcome. Hegel's own view of the end of history was that science and philosophy would be collapsed into a single knowledge,<sup>300</sup> and that the spirit would thereby find total self-substantiation in a self-awareness that was both comprehensive and immediate. At an individual level, we would be enabled by the science of philosophy to reconcile our wills, desires, and freedoms, thereby enabling the maximal development of thought and action. At the social or political level, all citizens would understand themselves as participating in a necessary reciprocity of rights and duties. It is then somewhat baffling that he should describe, and apparently accept, the end of history in the terms that he does, especially if one compares his description of the bureaucrat in *Lectures on Fine Art*<sup>301</sup> with his description of the citizen of Absolute Spirit in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.<sup>302</sup> There is even reason to believe that Hegel predicted something similar to an aesthetic politic when he was younger, as seen in the remaining fragments of *The Earliest System Programme of German Idealism*<sup>XXVI</sup>

XXVI An interesting and more detailed exposition of this argument is given in Harries' analysis.

We might well ask, along with Harries, why should history end in such spiritual shambles? Is it truly impossible to reconcile autonomy and identity? Or should we accept that for all his brilliance in the exposition of reason and the principles of modernity, Hegel was yet a man who hoped that the peak of civil society was 18<sup>th</sup> century Prussia?<sup>303</sup> Likewise, Kojève's description of the Olympian idylls of the reanimalized man are far from the *Gottdamerung* so eagerly bemoaned by contemporaries, and aesthetic imperatives are heavily suggested throughout his analysis. And while my own regard for Arendt should by now be obvious, I cannot help but wonder if she had omitted the development of a fourth *vita activa*, that of the playful society. This is not to belittle the efforts of modernity, as a great deal of play is very serious indeed; play, like art or philosophy, is autotelic, and can constitute an ethical liberal activity in itself when properly motivated. Arendt was quite right to observe that the labourer sees all but consuming activities as mere play, but the *animal laborans* is quite wrong to dismiss play as insignificant.

Finally, it would be remiss of us to fail to observe the telltale signs that abound everywhere of an aesthetic politic. As Schmitt has argued, the prerogatives of any independent sphere becomes political when taken to their logical extremes, and aesthetics is no exception. Most immediately, we can note that the government no longer defines the public sphere, but rather responds to the social. Modern liberal-democracies do not claim a right to legislate based on their aristocracy, the wielding of force, or moral superiority, but on their access to facts and specialists. In the Electromagnetic Age, government finds its influence largely limited to regulation, and in pushing a new regulation it must ensure that regulation will be palatable to its constituents. Consequently, there is as much emphasis on the presentation of the facts as there is on the facts themselves. Likewise, elections and nomination contests proceed from a base of image first, and leadership owes its attainment of office to the efforts of their party's scriptwriters and playwrights.

Canada and the United States have long shown a propensity for just this sort of political aesthetic. The literature is rife with commentaries on the leader worship exhibited by our political parties, and party platforms are considered synonymous with image, appeal, and branding.<sup>304</sup> Nowhere was the turn towards an aesthetic politic more obvious than in our past federal election, which was ultimately motivated by two things. Firstly, the existential threat that was perceived as residing in the persona of Stephen Harper, and secondly, the reassuring image of a playful Justin Trudeau, whose performance of his duties promised to be both earnest and lively. Contests between local representatives were treated as practically incidental to the larger struggle that was perceived to be taking place between leadership candidates; this kind of dismissal is common to Canadian politics though, and is not entirely without cause. The Canadian party system is so structured that it is possible for long-reigning parties to ingratiate themselves into government, thereby becoming a cartel party that seeks to monopolize bureaucratic resources as safely as possible.<sup>305</sup> The result is a party system that treats elections as a formality, voters as fans, and its local representatives as actors whose performance ensures the largest possible audience<sup>306</sup> for the image of leadership currently being touted by the party in question. One calls to mind Benjamin's aestheticization of politics.

Canada demonstrates another problem common to modern democracy, and that is the “widely diagnosed democratic malaise ... in which citizens have become increasingly alienated from, and distrustful of, formal processes and institutions of democratic participation”<sup>307</sup> so excellently observed by Barney. This apathy is demonstrated quite clearly by a history of declining voter turnouts and party memberships, while opinion surveys tend to reflect growing cynicism and disillusionment with democratic processes and political parties alike. Yet our capacity for collective action via social media has proved to be greater than ever before. The younger generations of the Electromagnetic Metaphor are still interested in affecting long-term political change, but they are wary of centralized institutions. Decisions are no longer made because of faith in government, or

even in the facts, but rather proceed from those appearances and events that participants believe represent a truth that can no longer be trusted to older institutions. What influence is retained by government is purchased through its compliance to societal expectations, and governmental authority does not so much rest in established institutions as it emerges from a crux between the arts and sciences.

One of the more prominent consequences of this trend has been the emergence of identity politics, of which the transgender movements are likely the most overtly aesthetic. They are founded on the assumption that one can choose a gender, or an external form, by which one's inner essence will be substantiated and made more intelligible to the self and to others: this harmonization of inner and outer meaning recalls Hegel's description of the beautiful and the ideal, and in affecting this decision an individual is making an aesthetic choice. Thus, the objective condition of gender itself has become a matter of subjective choice that motivates societal concerns. Social concerns in turn create pressure that compels governments to respond to decisions that are being made by parties actively seeking to operate outside their regulatory purview. And the more recent arguments that states are obligated to not only recognize this determination, but to also contribute their own means to the individual realization of those goals, is without precedent. Movements to have the nation-state assume financial, medical, and legal responsibility for one's choice of form must at least tacitly assume the dominance of aesthetic prerogatives in the selection of a meaningful life.

A less obvious extension of the shift to aesthetic prerogatives is seen in the outbreaks of smaller cultures touting nationalism or ideology, depending on one's perspective. Patriotic movements such as the Quebecois separatists, or the Brexit referendum in the UK are demonstrations of how the aesthetic has come to inform claims of authority and meaning. In either case, the adherents in question rely heavily on the romanticization of decontextualized periods of

history, employ extensive imagery in lieu of considered discussion, and are able to thrive in a liberal-democracy owed to their being founded on identities of choice rather than imposition. We can note that with few exceptions such movements are not interested in the repeal of liberal-democratic rights, but are rather concerned with an ostensible preservation of heritage in the face of Western homogenization. At any rate, neither the Quebec nor the Brexit referendums could have been said to have been motivated by a thorough consideration of the economic, social, or political realities associated with such a move: Quebec's first referendum was notoriously obtuse in terms of clarity, and the search term "What is the European Union?" became the most popular search term in the UK mere hours after the vote to leave.<sup>308</sup> The average Canadian had no idea what separation meant for Quebec, and the average British citizen had no idea what the European Union even *is*.

Similarly, we have just witnessed a contest of nominations in the United States between two actors, neither of whom can be said to possess anything resembling a comprehensive or a realist platform. When supporters choose either Sanders or Trump, they cannot be motivated by a thorough consideration of the facts and claims being laid before them. Democrats and Republicans alike are making their decisions based on the images and scripted events that were performed by their representatives, a word that takes on a wholly new meaning in an aesthetic politic. The nominations were won on images, and most voters did not choose these images because they are stupid or easily deceived, but rather because they believe that under those appearances are truths that can not be adequately expressed in mere words: many people do not support Trump because they agree with his statements, but because they perceive in his person a *symbol* of things to come.

Another phenomenon worth noting is the advent of the home-grown terrorist, an extremity of the japanized man by any other name. In his account of the end of history, Kojève describes the last refuge of those who would deny futurity as japanization,<sup>309</sup> an intentionally provocative term

meant to indicate an effort at preserving one's human essence through the purposeful adoption of strict cultural practises. The reference to Japan is astute, for Japan has preserved its culture in the face of commercial and technological homogenization by intentionally perpetuating itself as an arbitrarily determined essential character: the Japanese citizen is still very much concerned with fulfilling the role of a Japanese, by which activities the perpetuation of “Japan-ness” is secured. The extremity of this determination is the *kamikaze* pilot, who sacrifices their own life in order to fulfil their identity, but its tenets are easily seen in the works of more contemporary authors such as Yukio Mishima, Haruki Murakami, or Yasutuki Tsutsui.

The fact that such a cultural imposition must be arbitrarily determined is the hallmark of the end of history as described by Kojève. And in the context of the home-grown terrorist, the determination *is* arbitrary. In some instances, these individuals have purchased their Koran mere days before their attacks, and their assaults on the icons of modernity cannot be motivated by their inculcation into a religion they neither appreciate nor understand. They are, in effect, motivated by two prevailing sentiments. Firstly, an existential fear of the apparition of the universal homogeneous state, and secondly, their willingness to adopt whatever cultural forms might carry the appearance of being opposed to that same eventuality. The current Judas goat for that fear happens to be radical Islam, which explicitly seeks a return to history, but in the past has also been found in the tenets of various separatist movements and might even be seen in the pagan yearnings of many so-called anarchists. Whatever the case, the choices made by the societal outcasts in this regard must be recognized as aesthetically motivated, for they cannot be said to have stemmed from a true assimilation of the religious identity in question; it would be even less credible to claim such conversions reflect the adoption of scientific or philosophic paradigms.

Internationally, we might expect to see the consolidation of identity, and this despite the

increasing fragmenting of domestic populations. As aesthetic becomes an unspoken foundation for authority, so will narrative and identity experience a resurgence via nationalist or patriotic movements. This is the thinking that underlies the recent riots in Europe, the revival of the far-right in Austria, and of course, the Brexit referendum in Britain. The Universal Homogeneous State is thus more likely to appear as a Universal Homogeneous Civilization, and in the course of this development we may yet see the rebirth of empire.<sup>310</sup> Wars between the forces of history and modern liberal-democracies are increasingly likely to manifest in the creation and destruction of *symbols* and *images* just as much as they are material attacks on strategic targets. The iconoclasts who perpetrated the 9/11 terror attacks chose the towers with an explicit view towards the destruction of the symbols of the West; the Charlie Hebdo attacks undertaken in Paris were an effort at physically annihilating the concepts of the West via symbolic destruction; and France's response to the recent massacre at a homosexual nightclub in Orlando was to construct a massive spectacle of light art symbolizing Europe's stance against the antiquated notions of other histories.

Somewhere, a soldier learns how to pilot a drone via interactive virtual mediums designed by talented artists in collaboration with trained programmers. Somewhere, a nursing student spools DNA from a strawberry using homemade tools. Somewhere, a scientist converts the wavelengths of distant stars to a variety of pigments laid over a canvas, the entirety of which serves as a celebration of the structures of the human eye. Somewhere, an artist has just received a grant for the recombination of living genetic material. This is the world of the technologically-enabled aesthete, a world of playful animals indulging in a virtual reality, and a world for artful gods. This is our world.

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