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Art and the Arts

that had seemed self-evident, since they were based on the distinction between functional and nonfunctional art. Fritz Wotruba recently drew my attention to the fact that many of his own sculptures start off with the rudiments of the human figure and then develop in a process of increasing dematerialization into quasi-architectonic forms—he referred specifically to Scharoun.<sup>6</sup> As someone accustomed to relating aesthetic experiences to the realm of art with which I am most familiar, namely, music, I note such phenomena simply as arbitrary observations; it is not my business to try to classify them. But they are so numerous and so persistent that one would have to be blind not to suppose that they are the symptoms of a powerful trend. I should like to try to understand this development and, in particular, to interpret this process of erosion.

It has the greatest power where it is intrinsic, that is to say, where it arises from the genre itself. It is not necessary to deny that many works cast sheep's eyes to one side or the other. When musical compositions borrow their titles from Paul Klee, we are likely to suspect them of being decorative in nature, the very opposite of the modernity that they imagine they are laying claim to with such borrowings. Such tendencies are of course not as disreputable as the routine accusation of snobbery would like us to believe. The people who complain about fellow travelers are most often those who never go anywhere themselves. In reality, they are hostile to artists who are out in front. Immunity to the zeitgeist is no virtue in itself. It is rarely proof of resistance; it is mainly a sign of provincialism. Even in the weak form of imitation the impulse to be modern is also an instance of productive labor.

But the eroding tendency is evidence of something more than flat-tery or the suspect synthesis whose traces frighten the beholder when they appear in the name of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*; happenings aspire to be *Gesamtkunstwerke*, but only as total anti-art. Thus even though we are strongly reminded of painting by the dabbing of notes down side by side in the creation of musical sonorities, these dabblings should be traced back to the principle of *Klangfarbenmelodie*, with its inclusion of timbres as a constitutive element; rather than to the attempt to imitate painterly effects. Almost sixty years ago Webern wrote pieces consisting of pointillist-like groups of notes as a critique of the otiose note-spinning that can so easily give the illusory impression that something is actually taking place. And the graphic notations in the invention of which playfulness has a

In recent times the boundaries between the different arts have become fluid, or, more accurately, their demarcation lines have been eroded. Musical techniques have evidently been stimulated by painting, both by informal techniques and by the constructivism of artists like Mondrian. Much music inclines toward the graphic arts in its notation. Musical notation is becoming similar to autonomous graphic imagery and is even developing a certain autonomy from the composition, most visibly, perhaps, in the works of the Italian artist Sylvano Bussotti, who was a graphic artist before he turned to music.<sup>1</sup> Specific musical techniques, such as serialism, have influenced modern prose, like that of Hans G. Helms,<sup>2</sup> for example, by way of compensating for the retreat from narrative contents. For its part, painting no longer wishes to confine itself to mere surfaces. Having bid farewell to the illusion of spatial perspective, it now presses forward into space on its own account; here we may mention Nesch,<sup>3</sup> or the rampant creations of Bernard Schultze.<sup>4</sup> In Alexander Calder's mobiles, sculpture, which has abandoned the imitation of movement of its impressionist phase, has ceased to remain motionless in all its parts and aspires to make itself temporal, like the aeolian harp, with its principle of random movement.<sup>5</sup>

Musical passages have become interchangeable or have abandoned a set order and hence lost something of their fixed temporal sequencing; they have abandoned any similarity to causal relations. Moreover, sculptors have ceased to respect the boundaries between sculpture and architecture

certain, by no means illegitimate role are a function of the need to record musical events in a more flexible manner than is possible with the traditional signs based on tonality; conversely, they sometimes want to create space for improvisation.

Everywhere here purely musical desiderata are being obeyed. It can scarcely be too hard to discover similar intrinsic motives in the majority of these phenomena of erosion. If I am not deceived, artists who give a further spatial dimension to painting are looking for an equivalent to the organizing principle that disappeared along with perspectival painting. By analogy, musical innovations that scorned what a selective tradition had defined as music sprang up in response to the loss of the dimension of harmony and the forms associated with it. Wherever tears down the bounding boundaries and then ended up overwhelming them.

This process plays its no doubt considerable role in the antagonism between progressive, contemporary art and the so-called wider public. Where boundaries are violated, fear may easily provoke a defensive reaction to miscegenation. This complex assumed pathological dimensions in the National Socialist cult of pure race and the denigration of hybridity. Whatever fails to abide by the discipline of zones that have once been established is held to be licentious and decadent. This holds even though these zones are not natural but historical in origin, some of them arising as recently as the definitive emancipation of sculpture from architecture, forms of art that had merged again in the age of baroque. The normal mode of resistance to developments that are supposed to be incompatible with a particular genre is familiar to musicians in the form of the question "Is that still music?" For a long time, this was the refrain of the chorus, while music still progressed in accordance with unquestioned, albeit modified, intrinsic laws. Today, however, the avant-garde, when confronted by the philistine question "Is that still . . .?", takes it quite literally. It sometimes responds with a kind of music that really no longer aspires to be music any more. A string quartet by the Italian composer Franco Donatoni, for example, consists entirely of a montage of noises produced by the four stringed instruments. György Ligeti's very important, highly wrought *Atmosphères* does not recognize any single notes that are distinguishable in the traditional sense. Edgar Varèse's *Ionization*, which was written decades ago, was a prototype of such aspirations, a prototype because despite an

almost total renunciation of specific pitch levels, the rhythmic progressions ensure that a relatively traditional musical impression results. The artistic genres appear to revel in a kind of promiscuity that violates some of the taboos of civilization.

At the same time that the blurring of the clean divisions between different genres of art produces anxieties about civilization, this trend also adapts itself, unbeknownst to those who feel the anxieties, to the rationality and civilization that art has always been involved in: in 1938, a professor at Graz University by the name of Othmar Sterzinger published a book entitled *The Principal Features of the Psychology of Art*, dedicating it to "the friends of the arts." The latter plural, touchingly philistine, sheds light on the subject: a profusion of goods on display for the contemplative observer, from the kitchen to the lounge, goods that are then inspected and sampled in the course of the book. In the light of the funeral phrase stating that a wealthy man, now departed, was a friend of the arts and had supported them generously, the impatience of art itself becomes entirely comprehensible when confronted by this profusion. Such impatience regularly attends the no less revolting idea of the enjoyment of art that celebrates its pathetic orgies among people like Sterzinger, namely, the orgies of soulless repetition. Art would prefer to have no more to do with its sensitive friends than is unavoidable for material reasons. "My music is not lovely," grumbled Schoenberg in Hollywood when a film mogul unfamiliar with his work tried to pay him a compliment. Art renounces its culinary side; it became incompatible with its spiritual aspect when it lost its innocence, that of its unity with the composed material, a unity that had become the function of mellifluous sound in the gradual process in which such sound came to dominate the musical material. But now that the culinary element, sensuous charm, has split itself off and become an end in itself and the object of rational planning, art rebels against every sort of dependency upon pre-existing materials that are reflected in the classification of art according to different art forms and that resist shaping by the autonomous artist. For the scattered materials correspond to the diffuse stimuli of the senses.

The great philosophers, Hegel and Schopenhauer among them, have labored, each in his own way, at the question of heterogeneous multiplicity and have attempted to provide a theoretical synthesis. Schopenhauer did so in a hierarchical system, crowned by music. Hegel's attempt took the form of a historical, dialectical system that was supposed to culminate

in poetry. Neither attempt was adequate. It was obvious that the ranking of works of art did not coincide with the ranking of the different arts. They depended neither on the position of one art in the hierarchy of the arts nor—as indeed the classicist Hegel was careful not to assert—on their historical position in the sense that the later work was the superior one. Such a general assumption would have been as false as its opposite. A philosophical synthesis in the idea of art that would strive to go beyond the simple coexistence of the various arts condemns itself by judgments of the kind made by Hegel about music or by Schopenhauer in his attempt to preserve a niche for historical painting. In return, the actual historical development of art does move toward such a synthesis. Kandinsky's book *On the Spiritual in Art*, whose title amounted for good or ill to a summing up of the latent program of expressionism, was the first to register this process. It is not for nothing that in it technical reciprocity replaces a symbiosis of the arts or their agglomeration in the cause of some intensified effect or other.

The triumph of spiritualization in art, which Hegel anticipated in his discussion of what he called the romantic work of art, was, however, a Pyrrhic victory, like all triumphs. Kandinsky's ambitious manifesto does not shrink from citing bogus evidence, right down to Rudolf Steiner and the fraudulent Madame Blavatsky. In defense of his idea of the spiritual in art, Kandinsky welcomes everything that appealed to spirit in its battle against positivism, even spirits. This cannot be blamed simply on an artist's lack of a firm grounding in theory. There are more than a few artists who have worked at their trade and have felt and still feel the need of theoretical justification. The fact that the objects of their art and their artistic methods no longer seem self-evident leads them to reflect in ways that sometimes go beyond their control. Indiscriminate, half-educated, they take their ideas where they find them.

But my point does not concern individual subjective failings. Even though Kandinsky's book remains faithful to the experience of the moment, the substance of this experience has its dubious side, as well as its truth. This forces him to underpin it with dubious arguments. Since spirit can no longer be satisfied in art with sensuous appearance, it becomes autonomous. Today, just as fifty years ago, the compulsion implied here is one that everyone can reconstruct for himself when he reacts to the sight of sensuous, pleasing works of art, however authentic, by saying "You just can't do that any more."

Such a legitimate and unavoidable process of making spirit autonomous, however, almost inevitably sets spirit at loggerheads, abstractly, as Hegel would have said, with the materials and methods of the works. Spirit is then inserted into the works, as with allegories in times past. Paradoxically, what then decides the sensuous meaning of something spiritual—for example, the symbolic value of colors—turns out to be a matter of convention, the very category against which the entire modern movement in art rebelled. This can be confirmed by the connections between radical art in its early phase and arts and crafts. Supposedly significant colors, sonorities, and so on play their murky part in this. Works of art that rightly deserve sensuous charm turn out to need a sensuous foundation, if they are to be "realized" at all, to use Cézanne's word. The more rigorously and ruthlessly they insist on their spiritualization, the further they distance themselves from what is supposed to be made spiritual. Their spirit seems to hover above it; between spirit and its embodiments whole chasms open up.

The primacy of context that is created in the material by the principle of construction is converted by this domination through the spirit into the loss of spirit, namely of intrinsic meaning. From that point on, all art suffers from this contradiction, and the most serious art suffers the most painfully. Spiritualization, the rational manipulation of artistic methods, seems to drive out spirit as the substantive content of art. What set out to spiritualize the material of art ends up in the naked material as if in a mere existent, just as was explicitly called for by a number of schools—in music, by John Cage, for example. Spirit, which Kandinsky had defended as pristine, as literally true, becomes noncommittal, and is therefore glorified for its own sake: "You must believe in the spirit!" And very much in the same vein, Schoenberg in his expressionist phase found himself unable to dispense with theosophy since theosophy could, as it were, conjure spirit into existence.

In exchange, the individual arts aspire to their concrete generalizations, to an idea of art as such. We can explain this once again with reference to music. With his integrated approach, which attempts to include within itself all possible musical dimensions, Schoenberg gave a powerful impetus to the process of standardizing music. At the level of theory, he expressed this in a doctrine of musical coherence. All the particular aspects of a musical composition were to be subordinated to this; for him the theory of composition was this theory. Much light can be shed on the development of music in the last twenty years in terms of the primacy of the notion of coherence [*Zusammenhang*]. By following Schoenberg's program,



consciously or not, this development undermined what had been considered to be music up to that time, even in Schoenberg. He standardized virtually all the musical means of making interconnections that were to be found in the objective, not-yet-explicit history of music, and he did so in the service of the fully organized work. Confronted with the norm of artistic purposiveness, these means were quickly exposed as arbitrary and limited—as special cases of musical coherence, just as tonality had revealed itself to be a special case of the melodic and harmonic forms to which it could have recourse from time to time.

What was of immense importance, following Schoenberg, was for composers to take the step of separating his concept of musical coherence from its traditional assumptions and thereby from everything that had accreted historically in the concept of music. Thus music had even become allergic to such cohesive techniques as free atonality and twelve-note technique, in which the trained ear could still hear the traces of the tonality that such techniques repudiated. It could therefore freely face up to the concept of coherence, independently of the limited shapes that the concept had assumed and that had become an ingrained part of our hearing. The entire output of Stockhausen can be regarded as an attempt to test musical coherence in a multidimensional continuum. Such sovereign mastery, which makes it possible to establish coherence even in an incalculable variety of dimensions, creates from the inside the link between music and the visual arts, architecture, sculpture, and painting. The more the coherence-creating methods of the individual arts spread their tentacles over the traditional stock of forms and become formalized, as it were, the more the different arts are subjected to a principle of uniformity.

Of course, the requirement that the arts should be standardized as art, a requirement whose prototype was the process of integration within the different forms of art, is older than modernity. Robert Schumann coined the epigram that the aesthetics of one art is also the aesthetics of the others. The intention underlying this statement was romantic, and its point was that music should try to animate its different structural elements, which were increasingly seen as clichéd, and make them poetic, much as Beethoven was believed to have done by the generation that followed him and called him a "tone-poet" [*Tondichter*].

In contrast to the modern process of erosion, that romantic standardization placed the accent on subjectivity. Works of art became the im-

pression of a soul—one that was not necessarily identical with that of the composer. It was the language of the self freely expressing itself. This idea brought the arts closer to one another. It could no doubt be shown that the same soul animates all the different arts. But their boundaries were scarcely weakened by this. They remained what they were, and this disparateness is not the least important critical reason for the most recent development.

The problematic aspect of the aesthetic as something animated and of higher rank than its media can be best seen in the typical concept of "mood" [*Stimmung*]. From a certain point on, specifically, the point at which neoromanticism and impressionism were rejected, modernism turned against "mood." But what was so irritating about its amorphous softness was not narcissism—which the reactionary friends of more bracing artistic fare object to in the more differentiated art that they are unable to appreciate—but rather something connected with its objective nature: namely, the absence of resistance at its core. Where art looks for mood in a shapeless, high-handed way, it lacks the element of alterity. Art needs something heterogeneous in order to become art. In the absence of that, the process that every work of art is lacks a target and so just freewheels. The clash between the work of art and the world of objects becomes productive, and the work authentic, only where this clash is allowed to happen and to objectify itself by its friction with the thing it devours. No work of art, not even the most subjective, can be completely identical with the subject that constitutes it and its substantial content. Every work possesses materials that are distinct from the subject, procedures that are derived from the materials of art, as well as from human subjectivity. Its truth content is not exhausted by subjectivity but owes its existence to the process of objectification. That process does indeed require the subject as an executor, but points beyond it to that objective Other. This introduces an element of irreducible, qualitative plurality. It is incompatible with every principle of unity, even that of the genres of art, by virtue of what they express.

If works of art ignore this, they swiftly degenerate into that aesthetic hodgepodge that can be seen in the creations of people who are said to have artistic talent but no leaning toward any particular form of art. It is above all major artists whose gifts are not unmistakably tied to a specific material—I have in mind here Richard Wagner, Alban Berg, and perhaps even Paul Klee—who have every reason to expend their energy submerging a generalized aesthetics in specific artistic material. Nevertheless, that

aesthetics survives as an ether, as a reaction that refuses to bow to the all-too-realistic abrasiveness of material discipline. If art gravitates toward dilettantism as long as it remains satisfied with a generalized aesthetics, an art from which the last trace of that ether—the simple fact that someone is an artist—has been expunged simply dries up into philistine handicraft. It is not for nothing that the so-called movement of folk music and youth music was infuriated by that epigram of Schumann's. If the uniform aesthetics is too eager to bypass everything alien to the work of art—in Schumann's music this ominous process is converted into an aesthetic quality, namely an expression of disaster—then the contrary call to roll up your sleeves and do justice to the material of art is mere self-righteousness. It pretends that the heterogeneous aspects of the work of art, and especially those of its practices that have not been filtered through human subjectivity, possess a truth content that they do not have by right.

The conflict between art and the arts cannot be resolved by cutting any Gordian knots. Even in the late romantic period the arts resisted any conclusive standardization of the sort preached in the name of stylistic unity—for *Jugendstil* was nothing more than that. We know that the relationship of great neoromantic poets like Stefan George and Hugo von Hofmannsthal to the fine arts was anything but happy. They thought that they had an affinity with symbolist painters like Burne-Jones, Puvis de Chavannes, and Arnold Böcklin, and Stefan George did not scorn to refer to the impressionists in that contemptuous Wilhelmian phrase about cheeky paint daubers. They failed to recognize that there was more poetic value in impressionist techniques than in the subsequently notorious initiation at the mystical springs.

The fault for this did not lie with their literary eccentricity or the provincial ignorance of poets far removed from what was happening in Paris. More than a few poems by Stefan George contain imagery undeniably close to that of the disastrous painting of the symbolists. But because the best of them achieve their specific vividness in language rather than optically, they turn into something quite different. If you were to translate the autumnal landscapes of his cycle "After the Harvest" into paintings, they would be kitsch. But in their linguistic garb, where the color words have very different values from the physical colors on canvas, some of them succeed in defying obsolescence. Such values are a feature of poetry that poetry shares with music. The respect in which the arts differ essentially,

even though their contents and their associations may be very similar, can be seen most clearly in the case of music. The various types of expression in Brahms—old-German ballad, knight in shining armor or waywardly amorous—can be disputed only by people whose musicality lacks that ingredient of extramusical meaning without which music cannot exist. But the fact that these expressive elements are neither encapsulated in an image nor bluntly uttered, but instead just heard in a momentary flash only to disappear a moment later, ensures that they bear no resemblance to the historical myth-making of a writer like Joseph Victor von Scheffel. No criticism could pin the works down to such fleeting emanations of expression; they never protrude awkwardly or crudely from the texture of the music. On the contrary, they dissolve in the pure progress of the work, of a marvelously perfected musical language. This language is ignited by contact with these heterogeneous elements, but not for a single moment is it reduced to them or to their level. If masterpieces need luck in order to come into being at all, then Brahms's good fortune was that his ballads were made into music and not poems. The different arts may aim at the same subject, but they become different because of the *manner* in which they mean it. Their substantial content lies in the relation between the *what* and the *how*. They become art by virtue of this substantial content. But this needs the *how*, their particular language; if it went in search of something larger, beyond the particular form of art itself, it would be destroyed.

Attempts to give a definite answer to the priority of art or the arts come mainly from cultural conservatives. For it is in their interest to reduce art to unchanging factors that are openly or covertly based on the past and that can be used to defame the present and the future. Conservative, and certainly reactionary, thinking always wants to separate the sheep from the goats, and recoils from the idea of objective contradictions in phenomena themselves. They denounce dialectics as sophistry and witchcraft and refuse to countenance the possibility that it might be well founded.

The most resolute German advocate of qualitative distinctions between the arts, distinctions that scarcely allow for the concept of art at all, is Rudolf Borchardt. Borchardt, who inclined toward an extreme archaism, nevertheless paid tribute to Hegel in his essay on Benedetto Croce, although he also displayed his fundamental ignorance of Hegel's thought.

He subscribed to the erroneous belief that it was only in Croce that Hegel had really gone beyond academic squabbles to make his own original contribution. But he failed to observe that Croce had removed the element of true dialectics from Hegel's philosophy, believing that it was dead, and had replaced it with the notion of development that was current around 1900, which flattened everything out to a peaceful juxtaposition of different phenomena. Borchardt's own intention, as expounded in his essay "On Poets and the Poetic," is not afflicted with any sign of dialectic. Appealing to the authority of Johann Gottfried Herder, he attempts to remove the poetic from the realm of art altogether, describing it as a primal language, a "visionary faculty," that transcends the particular arts. Categories like untouchability, divine protection, exceptional status, and sanctification are peculiar to poetry and to poetry alone. In a historical overview, Borchardt sketches his outline of the constantly intensifying conflict between the poetic and the profane world. His watchwords are irrational:

Forget your aesthetics, forget your intelligence; such things have no access to the poetic. They may have access to the artistic. They may have access to literature. But where the poetic appears among you today, it is an integrated whole, as in the days of Solon and Amos, in which you can find the law, religion, music, and in which magic spells can be found as can a living life, a cornucopia, an encyclopedia of the world that is fundamentally different from the encyclopedia of the world provided by science.<sup>4</sup>

I cannot resist interjecting the question of how such an encyclopedic totality is to be reconciled with the Borchardtian *arcana*. It is reborn, he continues,

with every poetic mind, and every such mind conceives the wish to acquire a new shape and to transmit it to you, as in times past; in the past tense and the future, but without the present. It is future prediction, as of yore, and like the eternal day of creation it contains the future within itself, not, as the literati proclaim, in the shape of political revolution but as a return to God for the children of God, as in olden times when the poet carried a staff and wore a wreath.<sup>5</sup>

Borchardt has his eye on nothing less than the nonmetaphorical apotheosis of poetry, and "allowing the things that may still dwell among

<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Borchardt, *Prosa*, vol. 1, ed. Marie Luise Borchardt (Stuttgart: KGH, 1957), p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

you to have their own way, accepting them with shame and reverence however strange they may appear. For they are the Divine in its own forms. Await the revelation and make no attempt to assist it in any way."<sup>6</sup> And according to Borchardt, that is precisely what should happen in the other arts, especially the fine arts. With a rather forced naïveté, he exhorts his reader to attempt

to put himself back once again into the situation of primeval man, who finds himself confronted, on the one hand, by the poet as I have tried to depict him, and, on the other, by the artist, the sculptor, or the painter. You can watch him at his trade. You can stand next to him and watch him create something. See how he pours the molten metal and files it down when it has cooled; see how he draws; and you can see for yourself what his work is supposed to represent. He kneads the clay, and you can see what he is copying, or molding into a model. Associations come to mind; first of all the ability to identify an object, and after that, the aesthetic perception, the categories of rightness, resemblance, beauty. But the point I am concerned with is this: in the eyes of the naïve and spontaneous person, the painter and the sculptor are people who have mastered a craft . . . they are people whose work, when you stand next to it and look at it, may be the object of astonished admiration, of joyous applause. But it is no riddle. You can see how it has been made. In the case of the poet, however, you cannot see it. No one has seen it. For the Greeks and for everyone in those primeval times, the sensuous arts lack what I have referred to here: the mystery, the problem. And even if such artists were able to display skills of a very high, or even the very highest, order, what they lacked was intoxication, the consciousness of something quite transcendent. The muse of the fine arts is called not "Muse" but "Tekhné." What is missing is the demonic, the incalculable.<sup>7</sup>

The pathos here is a little stale; it is the recoil from the disenchanting and refined world. Borchardt's rhetoric cannot justify his insistence on the limits of the phenomenal. The idea that the historical forms of art that have arisen from handicrafts lack the supreme force, the ability, to express the highest realities can be asserted only by someone who wishes to compel handicraft to remain handicraft once and for all, and who is blind to the invisible contained in the visible. The visible process of making does not coincide with aesthetic value, and, on the other side, even the poet may let you peek over his shoulder when he writes. The mystery that Borchardt reserves for poetry is the mystery of all art that says, and yet doesn't

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.



say, what it says. In all probability, even the origin of the fine arts, the mimetic faculty, contained the opposing element of a supportive rationality, which speaks from archaic sculpture. And there can be no doubt that the fine arts acquired that rational component later on, with the growth of *tekhnē*. Borchardt's antithesis of sculpture as *tekhnē* and poetry is invalid because even in the fine arts language plays a mediating role, something from which Borchardt would like to distance them. Not to mention that music simply does not fit into his dichotomizing approach.

Moreover, what he thinks of as artifactlike, technical features belong with just as much right to poetry and have a crucial part in its success. It is inconceivable that a virtuoso of language like Borchardt, whose plea for poetry must have been made *pro domo*, should have overlooked this and should have attributed everything to inspiration, much like an operetta composer boldly enthusing about Mozart. Borchardt translated Pindar, Dante, and Swinburne into German, the latter in masterly fashion. Would he really want to deny the seriousness of Pindar's artistic skill, which he rather coquettishly labels philistine? Is Dante's work, with its wealth of real and allegorical meanings, nothing more than intoxicating? Is he unable to hear the technical components of Swinburne's musiclike verse, which are separated from their material and which master it by virtue of that separation? The colossus of poetry conjured up by Borchardt's suggestive rhetoric stands on the proverbial feet of clay. It's a joke. The wealth of associations and antitheses deceives us, so that the object Borchardt calls the most serious of all, which he wishes to tell us about, turns out, as soon as we take it seriously, to make a mockery of the attempt to draw definite distinctions between the different arts and, as it were, to fix them ontologically.

The position of Martin Heidegger is at the opposite pole from that of Borchardt, but it is no less ontological, albeit in a more considered fashion. In fact, Heidegger's commentaries on Hölderlin's poems contain passages that take their cue from Hölderlin's own verse. In them he ascribes to the poet, whom he sees as a founder, a prerogative similar to Borchardt's. In this respect both were probably inspired by the George school. But in accordance with the concept of Being that dominates his thought, Heidegger desires unity, to an incomparably greater degree than does Borchardt the artist. His theory that Being has always existed in the world, that it transcends into existing things, does not allow him to despise technology any more than does his old preference for handicraft,

the ultimate model for readiness-to-hand [*Zuhandenheit*] in *Being and Time*.

Whereas Borchardt confuses art and religion and suppresses the constitutive element of secularization in works of art, Heidegger's text on the origin of the work of art in *Holzwege* has the merit of providing a sober account of the thinglike nature of objects, a feature that, as Heidegger remarks with justifiable irony, the much acclaimed aesthetic experience cannot ignore. The quality of being a thing and the quality of unity—the unity of rationality, which, however, is swallowed up by Heidegger's concept of Being—these qualities go together. But beyond that, Heidegger takes a further step that Borchardt would find unacceptable. He asserts that all art is essentially poetry and that therefore architecture, painting, and music have to be reducible to poetry.<sup>6</sup> He is not unaware of the arbitrary nature of this statement in its application to the different arts, which are "ontic" beings in his parlance. He escapes from the difficulty by ontologizing the artistic as the "illuminating design of the truth." This is what poetry [*Dichten*] is in the broader sense, while poetry in the sense of writing verse is merely one mode of this.

In contrast to Borchardt, an artist of words, Heidegger specifically emphasized the linguistic nature of all art. However, because of that ontologization, the distinctions between the arts, their relation to specific materials, is elided as a matter of secondary importance. What remains following this subtraction is something quite vague, despite Heidegger's protestations. This vagueness infects Heidegger's metaphysics of art, turning it into a tautology. The origin of the work of art, he maintains emphatically, is art. And, as always in Heidegger, origin is a matter not of genesis in time but of the essence of works of art. His doctrine of such origins adds nothing to what has been originated, nor can it do so, because in that event the doctrine would stain the originated with the stigma of the very existence that the sublime concept of origin wishes to leave behind it. Heidegger rescues the unifying element of art, that which makes it art, but at the price of a situation in which theory reverently falls silent when confronted by the question of what it is. If art is rendered invisible by Borchardt's sudden flight into the claim that theology is its true sphere, in the

<sup>6</sup> See Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," trans. Albert Hofstadter, in Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 74.

case of Heidegger, art is dissipated in a realm of pure essences without content. As if crushed by the pressure of the attempt by the varieties of art to assert themselves, the unifying aesthetic factor shrinks to what Heidegger once said of Being, namely, that it is ultimately nothing more than itself. Art can be distilled neither into the pure multiplicity of the different arts nor into a pure unity.

In any event, we must dismiss the naive, logical view that "art" is no more than the generic term for the arts, a genus that contains different species within itself. Such a pattern is negated by the heterogeneous nature of the subforms it embraces. The generic term "art" ignores not merely what is accidental but rather what is essential to the arts. It is enough to remind ourselves that historically, at least, one essential difference among the arts has distinguished between, on the one hand, those that are or were based on images and continue to feed on that tradition, that is to say, the imitative or representational arts, and, on the other hand, those, like music, that dispensed with images at least initially, and had them grafted on only gradually, intermittently, and always precariously. There is a further qualitative distinction between literature, which depends upon concepts and cannot dispense with them entirely, even in its most radical form, and the nonconceptual forms of art. Admittedly, music did possess certain conceptlike qualities, as long as it employed the prescribed medium of tonality, that is to say, as long as it employed harmonic and melodic tones, the few tonal chord-types and their derivatives. However, they were never the defining units of the material they subsumed. Nor did they ever "refer" to anything as a concept refers to the phenomena to which it belongs; they resembled concepts only in that they could only be used as identical forms with the identical function. Differences like these have their own profound implications, but at all events they demonstrate that the so-called arts do not form a continuum that would allow us to provide the entire complex of phenomena with a single unifying label.

Without their knowing it, the arts may erode one another's boundaries in order to abolish the differences between phenomena that go by the same name. The comparison with a musical phenomenon and its development can perhaps elucidate this. An orchestra is no complete totality in itself, no continuum of all possible timbres. This is because there are noticeable gaps between them. Originally, electronics hoped to be able to make good the defective homogeneity of the orchestra, although it was soon re-

alized, that it differed from all the traditional sources of sound and thus abandoned the model of the integrated orchestra.

Without doing violence to either of them, we may compare the relation of art to the arts with that of the orchestra to its instruments. Art is no more the concept embracing the arts than the orchestra contains the spectrum of all possible timbres. Notwithstanding this, the concept of art has its truth—and the orchestra likewise contains the idea of a totality of timbres as the goal of its development. In contrast to the arts, art is in the process of formation, it is potentially contained in each art form, just as each must strive to liberate itself from the chance nature of its quasi-natural aspects. However, such an idea of art in the arts is not positive, it is not anything simply present in them, but must be thought of exclusively as negation. We have only negatively unified the arts in terms of content, over and above the empty classificatory concept: all recoil from empirical reality, all tend toward the formation of a sphere qualitatively opposed to that reality: historically, they secularize the magic and sacred realms. All require elements taken from the empirical reality from which they distance themselves, yet their products are part of that reality.

It is this that conditions the dual stance of art toward its forms. In tune with their inextinguishable involvement in empirical reality, art exists only in the arts, whose discontinuous relation to one another is laid down by reality beyond the world of art. As the antithesis to empirical reality, by contrast, art is one. Its dialectical nature consists in the fact that it can carry out its movement toward unity simply and solely by passing through multiplicity. Otherwise, its movement would be abstract and futile. Art's relation to the empirical stratum of reality is vital to it. If art bypasses empirical reality, then what it thinks of as its spirit remains external to it, like some outer garment or other. Only if it is immersed in empirical reality can spirit become substance. The constellation of art and the arts dwells within art itself. Substance finds itself stretched out between two poles: the one unifies and is rational, the other is diffuse and mimetic. Neither pole can be eliminated; art cannot be reduced to one of the two, or even to its dualism.

Of course, it would be too anodyne if we were to construct a view of the transition of the arts into art that failed to contain an element of substance, content that was itself nonaesthetic. The history of modern art is largely that of the ineluctable loss of metaphysical meaning. It is undeniable that the arts are unwilling to remain within the confines laid down for



them, but by the same token, the impulse of the artists who unresistingly go along with that tendency is closely implicated in that loss of meaning. They adopt it as their own cause, and are stimulated to push further toward that goal. Whether aesthetic theory can discover the term for this or whether, as is most often the case, it throws up its hands in horror and tries to catch up with events depends not least on its insight into the aspect of the artistic spirit that sets out to sabotage meaning. No doubt many go along with a trend that both removes the need for them to make efforts of their own and promises them a substitute for the security that has been undermined by the emancipation of art from its forms throughout the modern period.

It is inevitable that we should find a parallel in the ousting of philosophy in the Anglo-Saxon world by logical positivism: the utter renunciation of meaning of any kind, and even the idea of truth, evidently creates a feeling of absolute, doubt-free certainty, even if it is wholly without content. But this is not the whole story about the intoxication of insatiable disillusionment, for which the notion of the Absurd has meanwhile gained acceptance as a kind of magic spell, or about the self-awareness of one's own contradiction, of mind as the organ of meaninglessness. This experience reaches deeply into many of the phenomena of contemporary mass culture. To ask after their meaning is fruitless because they rebel against the concept of meaning and against the assertion that life is meaningful.

In the realm of aesthetics it is not unusual for the extremes to meet, at the top and at the bottom. For thousands of years, art has conceived of the alleged meaning of life in the imagination and drummed it into people. In its origins, even modernism did not doubt it, as it stood on the very threshold of what is taking place in our day. The work of art that contained its meaning in itself, that was determined by spirit in all its aspects, was the accomplice of what Herbert Marcuse has termed the affirmative nature of culture. Wherever art was a reflection in any sense at all, the illusion of its necessity confirmed that the thing to be reflected had meaning, however tragic or ugly it might turn out to be. The dismissal of aesthetic meaning today goes hand in hand with the dismissal of the work of art as a work that reflects our outer or inner nature. The erosion of the arts is hostile to an ideal of harmony that presupposes, as the guarantee of meaning, what we might call ordered circumstances within the kinds of art. This erosion of the arts wishes to escape from the ideological bias of art, which reaches

right down into its constitution as art, as an autarchic sphere of the spirit. It is as if the artistic genres, by denying their own firm boundaries, were gnawing away at the concept of art itself.

The original example of the erosion of art was the principle of montage, which appeared before the First World War in the explosion of cubism and, probably independently of that, in experimenters like Schwitters, and after that in dada and surrealism. However, montage amounts to the disruption, and hence the denial, of meaning in works of art through the invasion of fragments of empirical reality that do not abide by the laws of art. The erosion of the arts is almost always accompanied by the attempt by works of art to reach out toward an extra-aesthetic reality. This element is strictly opposed to the principle of reflecting reality. The more an art allows material that is not contained in its own continuum to enter it, the more it participates in alien, thinglike matter, instead of imitating it. It therefore becomes virtually a thing among things, a something we know not what.

Such not-knowing expresses something with inescapable consequences for art. The loss of meaning that it has adopted as if from a desire to destroy itself, or that it takes as an antidote to save its own life, cannot be its final word. The not-knowing of explicitly absurdist works of art, such as Beckett's, marks a point where meaning and nonmeaning become identical. Admittedly, we would distort this identity if, heaving a sigh of relief, we were to read a positive meaning into his writings. Nevertheless, it is not possible to conceive of a work of art that does not create meaning after all, even if it does incorporate the heterogeneous and turn against its own meaningfulness as a totality. Metaphysical and aesthetic meaning are not one and the same thing, even today. The nonmeaningful realities that find their way into the domain of art in the course of erosion are potentially salvaged as meaningful by art, at the same moment as they fly in the face of the traditional meaning of art. The consistent negation of aesthetic meaning would be possible only if art were to be abolished. The latest significant works of art are the nightmare of such an abolition, even though by their very existence they resist their own destruction; it is as if the end of art threatens the end of mankind, a mankind whose sufferings cry out for art, for an art that does not smooth and mitigate. Art presents humanity with the dream of its doom so that humanity may awaken, remain in control of itself, and survive.

The negativity of the concept of art impinges on its contents. Its own nature, not the impotence of our thoughts about it, forbids us to define it; its innermost principle, that of utopia, rebels against the domination of nature that its definition implies. It does not wish to remain what it once was. How dynamic this makes its relation to the individual arts can be seen from its newest form, the film. The question whether the film is art or not is idle. On the one hand, as Benjamin was the first to show in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," film comes closest to its own essence where it ruthlessly eliminates the attribute of aura that characterized all art before film, that illusion of transcendence guaranteed by its context—to put it another way, where film renounces symbolic and other elements that confer meaning to a degree that could scarcely be imagined by realist painting and literature. Siegfried Kracauer concluded from this that film, as a sort of salvaging of the extra-aesthetic world of things, was made aesthetically possible only by renouncing the principle of style, through the intention-free immersion of the camera in existence in its raw state prior to all subjectivity.

But such a refusal, taken as the a priori premise of filmmaking, is itself a stylistic principle. For all its abstinence from aura and subjective intention, film technique inevitably feeds elements of meaning into the final product: through the script, the photographed images, the camera's point of view, the cuttings—methods not unlike those adopted in music or painting, which also want the material to appear naked before the viewer or listener but inevitably preform it in the process. Although film would like to discard its artlike qualities while adhering to the intrinsic laws governing it as a form—almost as if art were in conflict with its own artistic principle—film remains art in its rebellion and even enlarges art.

Such a contradiction, which, incidentally, cannot be worked out in a vacuum because films are dependent upon profit, is the element of all authentically modern art. This indeed may be the secret inspiration of the erosion of the arts. In this sense, the happening is exemplary—even though ostentatious meaninglessness does not necessarily express, or give shape to, the senselessness of existence. Happenings surrender without restraint to the yearning for art to become a reality of its own, in contradiction to its own principle of stylization and its relation to the image. In this way happenings can conduct an aggressive, even shocking campaign against empirical reality, whose equal they wish to become. In their clown-

like detachment from the purposes of real life, in the middle of which they are acted out, they are essentially its parody, and parody—for example, parody of the mass media—is what they unmistakably aim to achieve.

The erosion of the arts is a false destruction of art. Art's inescapable nature as appearance becomes a scandal in the face of the overwhelming power of economic and political reality, which makes a mockery of aesthetic appearance even as an idea because it allows no space for the creation of aesthetic substance. That appearance becomes steadily more incompatible with the principle of the rational domination of its material, with which it had been united throughout the entire history of art. While the present situation no longer has room for art—that was the meaning of the statement about the impossibility of poems after Auschwitz—it nevertheless has need of it. For reality without images is the counterpart of another condition without images: the condition in which art disappears because the utopia encoded in every work of art has been fulfilled. In itself art is not capable of such a demise. This is why the arts eat away at one another.

(1967; GS 10.1: 432-53)

Translated by Rodney Livingstone