

DANGERS IN MODERN AESTHETIC THINKING AND THE POTENTIAL WAYS OF EVOLVEMENT

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Summary

The study, while analyzing the crisis-phenomena of 20th century aesthetical thinking believes the main problem to be the loss for a sense of the "entity" — a consequence of exaggerated analysis-demand. The study also states that the revolution of modern art happened along a double line: the thesis of Art Nouveau, heated by sentiment, penetrated by the thought of "the great entity" was answered by the anti-thesis of modernism with its intellectual severity, its demand for structure and analysis. The synthesis is being developed. With the novel language of expressing itself, with the aid of science abstract art puts forth new levels of visuality, a new image of nature evolves reflecting a knowledge of micro- and megastructures that may form the basis of a future cosmocentric art.

The two mainstays of modern thinking, intellectual analyzing tendency and transgression of human scale in observation form the basis of 20th century art but, at the same time also conceal great danger. Extreme intellectuality endangers artistic impulse and the endless resolution is in the long run to the detriment of seeing, requiring the entity and, instead of this entity it is the part, the elementary that becomes more and more the aim and ideal of analysis. "The sense for entity" demanded so pressing by Gropius from the aspect of modern artistic thinking, gets more and more into the background due to a gravitation towards the part and the elementary. The decrease to be observed as to demand for synthesis to the advantage of the analyzing passion thus becomes an ever stronger tendency in modern aesthetic thinking.

Let us keep in mind that at the turn of the century, Art Nouveau started its revival programme still in the name of the great entity, of synthesis. The great dream, the "great style", a synthesis of modern art could, however, not be realized. The failure was to suppose that a radically new artistic style, an aesthetic world concept can be developed without developing a radically new, visual language. It was believed that sentiment, longing to be off, nostalgia are sufficient to a renewal of art. The language used by Art Nouveau, despite all protests belonged to academies, to naturalism, and naturalistic form of expression married to abstract thought led to stylization, the intricate mode of expressing the richness of nature, so much envied from Eastern art became nothing but ornamentation. At the same time the pursuing of the symbolic meaning of the work at any price resulted in a kind of literariness and illustra-

tive character. And finally, nostalgia, looking back into the past, a desire for the ancient, the unspoiled, that detracted their interest towards the art of far-off worlds, Japanese wood cuts, Persian miniatures and the world of painting prior to Raphael, very soon changed to imitation of style. In this way the original aim, turned the wrong way, while trying to expel eclecticism, style-romanticism, sentimentalism through the front door they all returned through the back door and as a result, petty bourgeois taste squatting on the rampant world of line, form and fantasy crippled to the point of tripe the movement that started with such high ideals.

Thus Art Nouveau that held itself "the" modern art for many decades could, in reality, not realize its aims, did not become the art of the 20th century.

The process forming the real visual arts of our century came about from a movement practically unknown in its time and later notorious, with its representatives: the three giants evolving from impressionism, Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin, further the Fauves and somewhat later different "isms", the abstract, Bauhaus and the so-called avantgarde in general. This line that did not base on the great entity of style, on synthesis but basically on analysis, developed its programme with great consistency, reckoning with the necessity that requires a total conversion of thinking to bring about the new arts that can be compared but to the revolution of scientific thinking. For the first time in humanity's history this grandiose undertaking destroyed the many thousand years old building of visual thinking and created a *new system of symbols that discovered the new planes of reality.*

Abstract art — that may be called the art of the century — fought its fight in this way. But it was a somewhat Pyrrhanean victory: it was left with no real audience, a low number of connoisseurs and a high number of snobs, shut into its own subtle world. It turned its back to nature that became suspicious to it and with nature a great mass of people in whom the undying idea lives on that art and nature are somehow inseparable. Abstract art reminds of someone who, wanting to build a new house tears down the old one but forgetting about his purpose starts playing with the old, broken pieces. "Every entity is broken" — says the Hungarian poet, Ady. Yes, the great "fitting together" did not yet realize and this was also felt by the best representatives of modern art. As Klee puts it: "I sometimes dream about a work of high inspiration, a comprehensive work that embraces the elementary, the factual, the contentual, the entire field of style but I am afraid this will remain but a dream. Still, it is worthwhile to occupy oneself with this as yet uncertain possibility already now, from time to time, at least in one's thoughts."

But modern art — at least a branch of it — continued towards the elementary in an ecstasy of analysis. Malewitsch's ideal "White square on white basis" goes on haunting and at the 1966 Biennale of Venice Fontana is awarded the Grand Prix for his snow-white canvases ripped with a knife in smart rhythm.

But analysis does not stop at the work of art. It goes on and, as a kind of caustic lye, an acid, dissolves everything and thus attacks also the ideal of art, declares the trite, the common to be the ideal and — in Pop Art — demonstrates objects instead of works of art. It attacks and endeavours to discredit the ideal of beauty and harmony, in general; making disharmony, tastelessness and the repulsive the ideal, it brings into existence the art of horror. In the name of revolting against conventions it destroys every norm of art and ethics and thus a wave of violence, brutality and pornography inundates art in the western world. It is an alarming process that makes itself felt in every field of art and of life itself. too, it is a phenomenon very succinctly expressed by Béla Mátrai Betegh, who says: "Something is tending upwards in the world . . . something that has no place there. It tends upwards in everyday life, but also in the arts."

The situation is more than critical. Art finds itself in a deathly solitude and is not even certain of being necessary, at all. The relationship between the artist and the connoisseur becomes distorted, the elegant crowd of spectators gropes about in a puzzled way in the showrooms among debris, junk, toy balloons figuring as works of art and as a final absurd gesture the artist exhibits himself on a pole, maybe nude, to the spectators not surprised at anything.

"Let us turn back from this way, no real art can be born here! Let us visit quite simply life itself, let us work for life! An artist must have a task to feel, while working, that what he does is by no means superfluous but necessary and then, slowly, the time will come when the artist does not see himself but only his work." How timely do these words sound. And yet, they were not said in our days but about seventy years ago by Aladár Körösfői Kirsch, one of the main representatives of Hungarian Art Nouveau.

How come? Could Art Nouveau give us advice in our present day artistic crisis? The dust-covered, outdated, ridiculed artistic pseudo-revolution to today's artistic thinking that has freed itself so proudly from illusions? However funny, this is the truth. More and more aims, ideals of Art Nouveau begin to have a new sense for us.

It seems that fate metes out justice for the second time. The first time was when, instead of the proudly conceited official trend that regarded itself the exclusively modern art, instead of Art Nouveau the then seemingly unimportant, artistic movements that caused indignation, were regarded as peripheral ones proved to be the real reformer of art, so much so that nowadays, if we speak about the beginning of modern art it is practically only and solely avantgarde, the "isms" we are thinking of. So, this was the first time that justice was meted out.

The second time is in process when the present time world-wide "official" trend, the abstract that is already practically academic, in the period of conscious non-figuration quite special demands are cropping up, a specific nostalgia is developing towards figurative art and, God forbid, towards Art Nouveau.

What was presentiment begins to be certainty, namely that the development of modern art went on along two fronts, was the child of a double movement. It was formerly believed that the only way is symbolism, Art Nouveau. Somewhat later today's middle generation thought *avantgarde* and the abstract to be "the" new art, signs of synthesis are just beginning to come up. The thesis of Art Nouveau, heated by sentiment, penetrated by the thought of the great entity, expecting wonders, the great anti-thesis of modernism answers with its intellectual discipline, its passion for analysis, with the severity of purism and functionalism. "The ornamental sin" said Adolf Loos and the Art Nouveau taste of the period richly deserved this verdict. But, since then, it turned out that it is impossible to live without ornaments, as nature itself is ornamental, too. And it also turned out that structure is not only present in the contrast of vertical and horizontal, in the statics of geometric forms but also in the world of elastic, living forms. Since then the thought of structure underwent deep changes, as geometric abstraction had to give way in abstract painting to abstraction of organic character as had been predicted by Kandinski at the beginning already. And so we again wished for ornaments, for the complexity of elastic lines, for sentiments, romanticism, even Baroque — as talk is going on about the Baroque of abstraction — and, what we mainly wished for, is entity instead of elementary.

And that is why, in the last analysis consciously or unconsciously we are attracted by the world of Art Nouveau and are expecting the great synthesis of sentiment and intellect in art. And thus, in a very strange way when crisis, the danger of disintegration is threatening, the way of unfolding is coming up, and hopeful tendencies are clarifying.

Looking back from a distance of one hundred years, everything that happened in the arts during the 20th century starts to formulate in our minds and unfolding in its true outlines. Many contradictions thought to be insolvable: representational and abstract art, the contradiction of artistic creation created according to nature or "free", independent from it begin to dissolve in synthesis. Slowly it becomes clear that what seemed practically unambiguous, as for instance a complete turning off from representing nature even from any representing is, in reality a pictorial image of the world in connection with a new nature-concept and a process in the development of a novel mode of representing nature. It so seemed in the beginning, that by the termination of representation painting is "cleaned" so to say by itself from nature, as professed by the purist artistic attitude of the twenties. But "it is impossible to stand up against nature, it is stronger than the strongest man" — as said Picasso. And what was believed to be a drawing away from nature was but drawing away from a nature-concept believed to be the only and absolute proved to turn into an unintentional creation of a visual symbol-system embracing new planes of reality, corresponding to a new concept of nature. As to the colour- and form relations,

form-systems that abstract painting brought about — obeying, so to say, the laws of so-called pure pictorial quality — it turned out that they correspond to the colour- and form elements to be found in nature, too, first of all to the form-systems of a micro- and cosmic scale. We tried to drive nature away and it returned to us. We were and are witnesses to a very special process when pictorial analysis tears down the many thousand years old building of visual thinking and on this purified basis — it might be said that starting from the visual zero-point of Malewitsch's "white square on white foundation" builds the new symbol system of visuality that is suitable even for a pictorial representation of an infinitely small and an infinitely big scale world.

But it is not only the world of man's external environment that remains a subject of our art and turns up in a new formulation, but, as the most important man himself, the human element in a social, political, ideal concept. Works reflecting the ideal message of the world undergoing transformation indicate the way in this direction in socialist art and some of the masters of western art, do too (Picasso, Siqueiros, Rivera, Guttuso, Manzu, etc.).

And finally, as a further possibility the perspective of a new, cosmic art opened up due to a revolution in twentieth century aesthetic thinking and technical development. Formerly never noticed visual realities open up in future due to introduction to the cosmos, a multitude of sights that could not even be imagined earlier, cosmic regions, the foreign and inspiring beauty of unknown planets, their light- and colour effects, a dimension making infinity felt that is what the art of the future will have to account for. And, at the threshold of these shattering artistic experiences, realizations, today's decadent western art potters about with its junk, plays with its disgusting toys and is lost in its narcotic dreams. And to this sense of social "no way out" the intellectual loss of footing in thinking contributes a lot, the one the cosmic scale dimension processing of human scale thinking means, which is a kind of cosmic solitude- and strangeness sense, increasing the sense of social alienation. And in this way the other basic qualitative change in our thinking — the beginning formation of a cosmocentric aspect — hides in itself the danger of distortion. Still, we ought to beware of ascribing these negative tendencies to modern artistic approach itself. There are many who fear that art, getting ensnared in the net of science will become its so to say illustration, giving up the originally anthropomorphous basis. But the truth is that human scale did not disappear in today's art, but it changed. Man's real scale is cognition and man's limitations last till his cognition. In our days we get to know planes of reality that formerly had been unknown and unimaginable. In this extraordinary, widened new human world our first feeling is that of dizziness, as if we felt ceasing the intellectual gravitation accustomed to since many thousand years and we feel an instinctive nostalgia for the former, so well-known "human scale" world, its art. Both intellectually and aesthetically, we have to get "acclimatized" to this so immensely widened

human reality. This, necessarily takes to a widening of the concept of human scale but not at all a "dehumanization", of our concept of the world only a reassessment of former, more naive anthropomorphous concepts. At the same time the concept of the analogy of man and the world, living on since time immemorial got into the foreground of our thinking, in a new light. We take note of more and more relations between human organism and the regularities of nature, between the biological organization of individual man and society as a living organism. We speak more and more about the anthropomorphous relations of objects, machine constructions or architectural works realized by man (thinking machines, Le Corbusier's modulator, etc.). The worry for the presumed loss of humanity has no foundation but there is some danger we would try to delineate the boundaries of what we call "human" a bit too early.

However, the real danger in thinking is that the balance breaks down, due to overdone analysis we lose our sense for entity and instead of a novel interpretation of humanity the tendency of conscious dehumanization may take over. Losing sight of the relation between elements and the entity, preferring particle interest to the universal, this danger by far outgrows the boundaries of aesthetic quality and appears in all areas of our thinking and endangers our being at a biological, a social, a political level, from environmental pollution till being destroyed by an atom bomb. This is, so to say, a crisis in our way of thinking prior to a renewal, to getting to a higher level, prior, also, before finding again a higher order entity.

Analysis has to be followed by synthesis also in the arts but for this a long period of analytical decomposition was necessary. "The generation of 'isms' very logically followed along the way dictated by self-motion of elements of visuality that became autochthonous" wrote Lajos Nagy "and arrived to the abstraction of plastic symbol related but to itself, but this analytical work is, at the same time a new synthesis . . . Following the fragment-reality of "all entity is broken" it also held the promise of rebuilding a new "Entity".

There are many who await this renewal in art, that the "great style" should be here, the unity of art and society, the harmony of nature and man, no tragic solitude and shattering to pieces but a pure, uncorrupted and wise entity — a new renaissance — so to say.

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