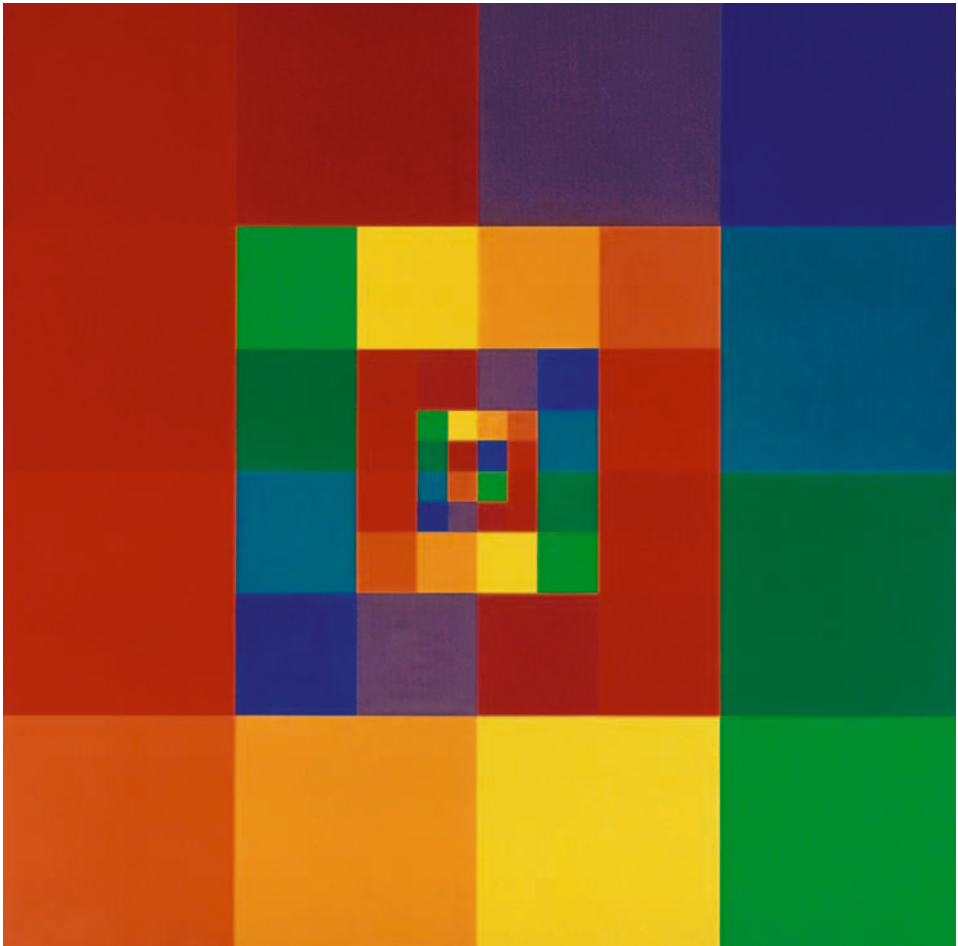


MAARTEN DOORMAN

Art in Progress

A Philosophical Response to the End of the Avant-Garde



AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

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A Philosophical Response to the End of the Avant-Garde

by Maarten Doorman

translated from the Dutch by Sherry Marx

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Contents

Foreword / 7

Introduction / 9

The second Labor of Hercules / 9

After history / 11

Whence, how, whither? / 13

1 Perspectives on Progress: A History / 15

The Great Exhibition / 15

The meaning of the history of ideas / 18

Koselleck: the history of ideas of progress / 21

Ideas of progress and related categories of change / 26

2 From the Ancients and the Moderns: A Door to the Future / 29

The Querelle between the Ancients and the Moderns / 30

A new look at an old question / 34

Perfection and perfectibility / 39

3 From Romanticism to the Avant-Garde / 45

The nineteenth century: Comte and Spencer / 47

Nineteenth-century cultural science:

from cave paintings to Rembrandt / 51

Modernism and the avant-garde / 54

4 On Making Revolution / 61

'The little Modernsky' / 61

The present as the past of the future / 63

The structure of artistic revolutions / 65

The progress argument / 70

The periodizing museum / 75

Progress as aporia / 77

5 Innovation in Painting and Architecture: De Stijl / 81

Abstraction and the beauty of a grain silo / 81

The new style and the spirit of the time / 88
Innovation in architecture / 91
Innovation in painting / 94
Consistent development / 103
The artistic revolution of De Stijl / 106
De Stijl and posterity / 110

6 The End of Art / 115

The cakewalk in the present / 115
The avant-garde as apotheosis: the end of art / 116
Forward again: the end of Arthur Danto / 122
Farewell to progress? / 126

7 A New Approach to an Old Concept / 131

Ever richer / 131
Art as cognition / 135
Progress as regulative principle / 143

Notes / 147

Bibliography / 165

Index of Names / 177

Foreword

In the damning criticism that Kant once wrote of the Swedish spiritist Emanuel Swedenborg, he apologizes for depriving his reader of a few moments 'he might otherwise have spent reading *substantial* texts on this material but probably with equally limited results.' Yet Kant believed he still accommodated his reader 'by leaving out many wild fantasies,' for which he expected as much gratitude 'as a patient might ever owe his doctors because they made him eat only the bark of the quinine tree, whereas they might have made him eat the whole tree.' This, I believe, is the best attitude a philosopher can adopt whenever he or she ventures into the realm of the arts. In the present book, I avoid wherever possible the numerous wild speculations often found in aesthetics, albeit for the purpose of making space for my own, a space I no doubt have granted too sparingly to others.

First published in Dutch in 1994, this book has evoked many critical responses, some of which I have incorporated here. Its original thrust, and, I hope, relevance, however, remain unchanged. Regrettably, I have had to make one major concession to the translation. The original version included two empirical case studies: the first on ideas of progress in the De Stijl movement in art and architecture, the second on the so-called 'Fifties' Movement' (*Beweging van Vijftig*), which brought about a revolution in postwar Dutch poetry. I have had to drop the latter as it would have required too much explaining and because any attempt to conduct a thorough discussion based on translations of poetry is a risky undertaking.

As a result, there is relatively heavy emphasis on the visual arts. On the one hand, this is not problematic because the discussion concerning the presumed end of the arts in the final chapter of this book is conducted most explicitly precisely with reference to this area. On the other hand, I have no desire to limit myself to the visual arts, given that the apparent crisis in the contemporary arts has much broader significance and that the historical debates preceding it touch on all the arts.

This book would not have appeared in its present form without the rigorous and constructive criticism of Gerard de Vries and Maarten van Nierop. I am more indebted to them than Kant's hypothetical patient would probably have been to his doctors. I am also grateful to numerous colleagues and critics for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this book, and even

more to my dedicated and ingenious translator, Sherry Marx. I wish to thank both the NWO (Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research) for its generous grant, and the Prince Bernhard Cultural Foundation for its much-appreciated gift, without which this translation would not have been possible. Last but not least, this book would not have existed in any form at all without the enduring patience of my wife, Sigrid Sijthoff. It is to her I dedicate it.

Amsterdam, October 2003
Maarten Doorman

Introduction

The second Labor of Hercules

Ludwig Wittgenstein's foreword to his *Philosophical Investigations* begins with a motto borrowed from the nineteenth-century Austrian playwright and satirist Nestroy: 'One characteristic of progress is that it appears to be much bigger than it really is.' This is an unusual choice of motto, because nowhere in his *Philosophical Investigations* does he mention historical development or processes, let alone progress. Moreover, nowhere does he say anything of significance at all about such a concept.¹

No less intriguing is the way the concept of progress continues to resurface during the twentieth century. Progress, it was repeated, was a dated concept based on a metaphysical idea of history long since dismissed. The prevailing opinion was that it was a nineteenth-century idea that had been subject to criticism even in its own day, before being given the definitive death sentence with the outbreak of the First World War, when the optimistic West was forced once and for all to take off its blinkers.² Progress, it was reiterated, especially during the last two decades of the twentieth century, was the fossil fuel that for centuries had fed the grand narratives of history and the what-proved-to-be disastrous ideologies. But that fuel supply had now finally been exhausted, or, as Dutch writer Gerard Reve once put it: 'Progress doesn't exist, and it's a good thing, too, because things are already bad enough as they are.'³

It is striking that the philosophers of the previous century were continually preoccupied with repudiating a belief or idea that, according to the *communis opinio* of their discipline, had been outdated for many years. In this way, much twentieth-century philosophy resembles the struggle that Hercules faced when he had to chop off the heads of the much-feared Hydra, even though it was already known that the monster would grow new heads again instantly. The name of the many-headed monster in the present context is Progress, and the mythological impact of the concept of progress is no less far-reaching than that of the monster that Hercules took to task. But Hercules had more success in achieving his goal than philosophy has had in its struggle with Progress, for the question still remains of whether this philosophical undertaking has been completed. Might it not be more appropriate to turn Nestroy's motto around to read: 'Isn't it characteristic of progress that it appears to be much smaller than it really is?'

Much (especially European) twentieth-century thinking has thus focused on what has been called our technology-dominated culture. In the influential philosophy of the later Heidegger, but equally in such diverse authors as Lewis Mumford, Hans Jonas, Hannah Arendt, and Arnold Gehlen, the theme continues to be a fundamental criticism of the Western notion of progress – as an ever-advancing technology that, based on a fatal and shortsighted vision, increasingly ignores and threatens existence, culture, and life.

Criticism of the destructive power of progress – *le prix du progrès* – has seldom been absent, even in the Frankfurt School, particularly since the publication of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).⁴ Prominent postwar thinkers such as Marcuse and Habermas have paid much attention to what has been characterized as an instrumental or technical rationality. In their analysis of this phenomenon, developments are examined and questioned that, on closer scrutiny, all too often can be identified as the framework of an implicit ideology of progress.

This tendency has become even more pronounced in philosophers like Foucault, whose work can be seen as an ongoing struggle with the monster of Progress. On the one hand, his historical studies bring to light from countless perspectives, the structures through which our culture's development, understood as progress, is unmasked – as no less than an increasing disciplining and dominating of human existence. On the other hand, as a historian, he repeatedly emphasizes the breaks in the past, taking the discontinuities between the different periods as the starting point for the unmaskings.

The same hydra of Progress has haunted other areas of philosophy, including the remarkable debates launched in the philosophy of science following the publication of Thomas Kuhn's groundbreaking *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). These discussions focused most explicitly on the supposed rationality according to which science develops, but, under the surface, the question continually lurks of to what extent this development can be viewed as a form of progress, as a continual advancement of knowledge. It was precisely this uncertainty that led to the belief in progress being challenged. Seen in this light, the history of postmodernism can also be viewed with some amazement. Just as Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition*, announced the end of the grand narratives (which, after all, had been the legitimization of the ideologies that turned out to be so disastrous), so philosophers insisted endlessly on the death of the idea of progress during the last decades of the twentieth century.⁵

But perhaps the most striking area in which ideas of progress have manifested themselves as powerfully as they have invisibly – or rather, almost unconsciously – has been the arts. During the twentieth century, the question of the significance and applicability of ideas of progress to art was seldom the subject of serious study, but, at the same time, the idea of progress was one of

the crucial tenets of the avant-garde and, in fact, of all trends and movements (not insignificant words in themselves) in modern art. Works of art that were not 'modern' or that defied description in terms of an implicit jargon of progress went more or less unnoticed for years on end. It is only today, with the much-discussed end of the avant-garde, the 'crisis' in contemporary art that has been proclaimed with increasing frequency during the past few decades, and the widespread dissemination of postmodern thought that we see any reflective interest in that very influential historical category called 'progress.' However, the reflex to reduce this category to an absolute concept stands in the way of a proper analysis of any farewell to progress: Hercules continues to struggle in the dark, while the philosophers turn their heads in the other direction.

After history

Something is changing in the arts. It is difficult to say whether this has been so over the past fifteen or the past twenty years. It involves a complex phenomenon in very diverse art forms and as many different countries and cultural traditions. While art is being given increasing attention in Western societies, at the same time a feeling of disorientation prevails, a sense of vanity and futility which undermines that attention and gives it a fleeting character. A predictable future and a comprehensibly ordered past are slowly disappearing from view and with them, an orientation in the present. Art appears to be losing both its identity and its power through the pluriformity of its own success.

Such ideas and opinions are prevalent among artists, critics, and consumers in every branch of art. New compositions of contemporary music are in danger of being marginalized, either temporarily or permanently, while, because of their enormous diversity, there is almost no agreement as to which developments are truly significant, not to speak of the problematic relationship that exists between classical and popular music. In literature, the era of the experimental novel has ended, together with that of a diverse succession of innovations in poetry. Old forms are being revived again or emulated. During the past thirty years, architecture has freed itself from the long-standing domination of functionalism. It is now quoting from the riches of the past with varying degrees of exuberance. Artists and journals devoted to the visual arts have been discussing the end of painting for some years now, and all are worried about the rise of the so-called 'new media.' A growing number of genres overlap: it is often difficult to make a distinction between autonomous art, applied art, design, advertising, and the many other forms of mass culture.

This entire development – or, perhaps, this absence of development – is

accompanied by a sense of unease. Has everything already been said and done? Is innovation no longer possible? Was the *fin-de-siècle* a century ago only a brief glimpse of the all-destructive *finis millennii* we have just experienced? Have we really landed in a posthistoric period of art, where anything goes and consequently nothing matters? Whatever the answer, one thing is certain: art is in trouble. Some even say that the arts as we have known them for the past three centuries have had their day.

One of the foremost contemporary exponents of this idea is philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto. He has built his much-debated hypothesis regarding the end of art on a philosophical foundation, by attacking the very concept of progress in art. In doing so, he goes one step further than the many writers, critics, and artists before him who proclaimed the end of the avant-garde and modernism. He sees the present juncture as the culmination of a much lengthier development.⁶

Danto's fascinating account limits itself to the visual arts, but it also has much wider applications. In keeping with a current philosophical classification, he proposes three perspectives through which to view the history of art. The first perspective sees art as a gradually improving *visual description* of reality. Renaissance painter and writer Giorgio Vasari applied this perspective to a specific period, from Cimabue to Michelangelo, while during the twentieth century, Gombrich did the same for a much longer timespan. In this view, further perfection ultimately becomes impossible. Painting and sculpture, for example, have been outstripped by film, which, after all, captures movement and thus comes closer to approaching reality. The road to abstract art in fact leads nowhere because it diverges from the ideal of perfect mimesis.⁷

The second perspective sees art as *expression*. This approach is described as having been an escape route for visual artists during the first part of the twentieth century, as they became aware of the bankruptcy of representative, mimetic art. In this view, the notion of progress is regarded as nonsensical, much as it was in the previous view, because no 'mediating technology of expression' can be identified. Whereas the means of depicting reality can be described as a series of continually advancing techniques and skills (such as the discovery of perspective), the same cannot be said for expression. Seen in this light, the history of art is no more than a succession of distinct, more or less artistically successful, expressions, a kind of biographical series in which there is no progression.⁸

The third perspective views art, through Hegelian eyes, as a form of growing *self-awareness* in which the theoretical component steadily increases until the conceptual content becomes so great that art becomes philosophy. Here Danto convincingly allows for the autonomous nature of contemporary art and the now-dominant features of commentary, reference, and self-referentiality. Art becomes increasingly self-aware, its own object. In this case, too,

rather than inexorable progress, there is talk of an endpoint as in Hegel. And, according to Danto, this endpoint has already been reached in the visual arts. Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* can thus only be understood through a conceptual approach to art. This is why art has definitely become history. Good art can, of course, still be created in this postmodern, posthistoric era, but it is devoid of almost all relevance. Or, to put it differently, art has been transformed through its conceptual weight into a form of philosophy.⁹ This, according to Danto, is what makes it so fascinating.

Whence, how, whither?

With such questions in mind, this book seeks to shed light on the often implicit, yet influential, way that progress in art is understood. How do we relate to art's impressive past, whose structure postmodern criticism has changed forever? Is art truly nearing its end? Do the multiplicity of art forms and the complex state of affairs in nearly every branch of contemporary art indeed attest to a general crisis, or is the word 'crisis' just a modern-day commonplace? One problem that arises here is the ambiguity of philosophical criticism, which has long been preoccupied with ideas of progress in the implicit and indirect manner outlined here.

More attention must be paid to philosophical criticism of the ideas of progress. Is it, for example, possible to say anything meaningful at all about progress, as the later Wittgenstein might lead us to doubt? To answer this question, it must, if nothing else, be formulated slightly differently as: *how* have ideas of progress been used in the past, and *how* are they still being used? In which historic context can they be placed, and what function do they have in that context?

As these questions suggest, my book has adopted both a historical and a systematic approach. It attempts to combine an empirical with a more theoretical perspective and, in keeping with the lack of modesty common to philosophers, does not shy away from discussing *all* art forms. This approach inevitably takes me to the currently much-propagated interdisciplinarity of the cultural sciences, which was not so much a starting point as an endpoint of this book. Consequently, the philosophy of culture, the history of ideas, the history of art and literature, aesthetics, and theoretical history will continually overlap in the following chapters. Three questions are treated in succession: where and how did thought on progress in the arts arise? How have concepts of progress been applied in the arts? And what role do such concepts play in the discussion of contemporary art?

The first part of this book examines the intellectual history of the notion of progress in the arts. One of the unexpected heads of the hydra of Progress

already looms large in chapter one, which reveals how difficult it is to separate the idea of progress from the ideas derived from it. I have argued that there is little point in trying to trace the history of ideas of progress from antiquity to the present. A plea for the middle road, somewhere between an overly global realism and a nominalism excessively preoccupied with context, is followed by a description of the development of a new historical consciousness during the eighteenth century. This description paves the way for chapter two, in which a history of ideas of progress in the arts is presented. This history begins with the famous Querelle between the Ancients and the Moderns at the end of the seventeenth century, and describes how notions of progress gradually emerged during the Enlightenment, pushing finalist thought into the background. Chapter three completes this short history of ideas, reviewing in succession the ideas of revolution, development, evolution, and progress in the arts, from Romanticism to the modern avant-garde.

The second part of this book looks more systematically at the question of how such ideas have been applied over time. Chapter four examines Thomas Kuhn's model for scientific revolutions, in order to increase insight into artistic change, which often occurs in the form of radical breaks and is presented in terms of revolutionary rhetoric. This, in turn, facilitates a search for reasons underlying the major role that ideas of progress have played – and perhaps continue to play – in the arts. Chapter five includes a case study intended to clarify how ideas of progress are used, and how they function in the everyday reality of one, artistically innovative movement. The object of study is a specific magazine, that classical avant-garde vehicle for ideas of progress. More concretely, chapter five discusses the renewal in architecture and painting sparked by the movement known as De Stijl (Mondrian, Rietveld, Oud, van Doesburg, and others). Texts from the magazine of the same name (*De Stijl*, 1917-1931) are used to identify how artists presented themselves and how they understood their own work in terms of progress. The question is then asked of whether others, in later years, also interpreted those changes as progress. In this context, I examine the extent to which those changes might still be viewed as a form of artistic progress.

The same question recurs explicitly in the third part of this book. Chapters six and seven expound on issues already raised in chapters three and four: the posthistoric confusion following the end of the avant-garde, art as a permanent ever-accelerating revolution, and the consequences of the radical disavowal of progress in the arts today as signaled by Danto and others. By way of conclusion, it is suggested that progress in this context is not an altogether useless concept, and that there are several reasons for considering developments in the arts as a form of progress. Moreover, a re-evaluation of the concept of progress is seen as an important way of counteracting postmodernism's apparent attitude of lighthearted permissiveness in the arts.

1 Perspectives on Progress: A History

The Great Exhibition

The main attraction of the first World Exhibition, held in London in 1851, was the Crystal Palace. Through the glass walls of this renowned building, which could easily have housed seven football fields, light shone down on a vast array of achievements and inventions from the Western world. There, one could gaze in awe at the recently invented typewriter, Nasmyth's steam hammer, a sewing machine, and a solid ingot of quality steel weighing some 2,000 kilograms manufactured by the German Krupp concern. Confident, and filled with admiration, one contemporary wrote:

[...] the House of Glass will continue in the annals of history, long after the vaunted pyramids of Egypt [...] shall have crumbled into dust.¹

The primary purpose of displaying these products in the gigantic hall of the Great Exhibition was to entice the public to perceive them as future commodities. But they were being flaunted for more than commercial purposes. They were also an expression of national pride, demonstrating each country's advantage over the rest of the world. Moreover, in a broader sense, the exhibition was intended to serve as a historic milestone, an instrument for gauging the development of human society. To cite *The Economist* of 4 January 1851:

Of that wonderful half century the Great Exhibition is both a fitting close and a fitting commencement of the new half century, which will, no doubt, surpass its predecessor as much as that surpassed all that went before it [...] All who have read, and can think, must now have full confidence that the 'endless progression' ever increasing in rapidity [...] is the destined lot of the human race.²

It was an idea on display at the Crystal Palace: the idea of *progress*. The industrial revolution of the previous century had radically changed society, and although cultural critics and writers like Dickens and Dostoevsky portrayed the less glorious sides of these changes, an almost indomitable belief in progress pervaded all layers of society. Things were going well with mankind, and they could only get better.

Ideas of progress are usually associated with this unbridled nineteenth-

century optimism and would thus seem to be obsolete. But the history of ideas of progress is far from over. Whoever wants to know how ideas of progress function in today's world must study this history, because countless historical notions echo through them, and because it will become clear that such historical categories of change as those of progress are much more complex than the monolithic nineteenth-century idea of progress might suggest to us today, following decades of postmodern criticism.

Much has been written since the beginning of the twentieth century on the origin and history of ideas of progress. One such history is *The Idea of Progress*, by J.B. Bury, an often cited survey representative of much of the literature tracing the history of ideas of progress.³ Bury sees progress in terms of the idea that 'civilisation has moved, is moving and will move in a desirable direction'. He begins his search for the origin of the idea in antiquity but finds few traces of it there. This is because the Greeks did not have a long, recorded early history in which the notion of progress could be sought, although the idea did already exist then that civilization stemmed from an uncivilized situation. Change, too, was generally not viewed in a positive light: theories of decline and a cyclical view of history prevailed. Bury finds only a vague hint of the notion of progress in antiquity, in the Epicurean school, for example, in several passages of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* (On the nature of things).

Equally, he is unable to find hints of the concept in the Middle Ages. One impediment, he believes, was the prevailing notion of the Day of Judgment, as proclaimed in Revelation. In his view, the image of an almighty Providence stood in the way of his notion of progress, which was, after all, based on allowing man himself to contribute to that progress. Only in the late Renaissance, when the classics were no longer blindly imitated and the first signs of resistance to antiquity began to appear, was the climate ripe for such notions. Here Bury emphasizes the role of sixteenth-century French philosophers Jean Bodin and Louis Le Roy, who maintained that the world was not in a state of decay, that their own era was no less valuable than antiquity, and that such a thing as a 'world republic' – and with it, progress – was possible on a global scale.

According to Bury, the next step in the development of the idea of progress was found in Descartes, whose theory on the authority of reason superseded notions based on the authority of Providence. This was followed by the Querelle between the Ancients and the Moderns at the end of the seventeenth century, a controversy about whether the arts (*artes*) in antiquity were so perfect they could never be surpassed. In Bury's description, the idea of progress reaches its peak during the eighteenth century, initially in France. Developments in many areas were seen then as progress: in society, politics (Abbé de Saint-Pierre), culture, science, ethics (the Encyclopedists), and economics (Quesnay, Mirabeau). Broadly speaking, a similar development took place in

England and Germany, albeit some years later. Bury goes on to show how all-encompassing the concept of progress became in the wake of German idealism. He discusses the French Utopians, as well as Comte, John Stuart Mill, and Spencer, together with several lesser gods, before concluding that the history of the idea of progress appears to keep pace with the development of modern science, with a 'rationality' that he does not elaborate on, and with the struggle for political and religious freedom.

The hydra of Progress continually rears its head in Bury's historiography, as it does in many comparable studies. Although seemingly unaware of it, Bury describes the history of the concept in terms of the concept itself. He stares in awe at the history of ideas of progress, just as visitors to the Great Exhibition gazed in admiration at the typewriter, Nasmyth's steam hammer, and Krupp's quality steel as products of progress. With an almost contagious enthusiasm, he affirms conceptual realism, in which 'progress' is seen as a kind of eternal Platonic idea that has always existed and that will only come to fruition over time – without realizing that this form of progress is only a recent invention.

Like many historians of ideas, Bury scours history – that is, the available source material – to find out when and how this concept began to emerge. His approach is a striking example of what is known as the 'Whig interpretation of history,' where the past is smoothly modeled *on* and hence *taken from* the present.⁴

The numerous interpretations of the vast amount of source material available on the history of Western thought vary considerably. Bury, for example, discovers no more than a germ of the idea of progress in antiquity, and situates its 'true beginning' in the sixteenth century. In contrast, British sociologist and historian Robert Nisbet, in his book *History of the Idea of Progress* (1980), comparable to Bury's, views antiquity from a perspective permeated by the Christian heritage – as the forerunner of the later *flourishing* of the idea in the work of the Church Father Augustine. Although Nisbet begins with an idea of progress very similar to Bury's, he ends with something totally different. In his view, for example, the idea of progress is absent in the Renaissance, whereas in Bury this is precisely where the idea first manifests itself. Similarly, the important role attributed by Bury to the Querelle between the Ancients and the Moderns is explicitly denied by Nisbet. All in all, rather than being primarily historians of 'the' thought on progress, both Bury and Nisbet project their own opinions and ideas of interpretation onto history.

Such conceptual realism, which also defines history itself in terms of progress and development, is representative of much of the historical literature on progress, as well as of many of the traditional histories of ideas, although not all studies go as far back as antiquity. But even if a later and shorter period is studied, and regardless of whether it is explicitly defined or

not, an idea of progress is assumed and subsequently plunged like a thermometer into history, to take the temperature of progress.

The meaning of the history of ideas

The question ‘how useful is this kind of history of ideas,’ is seldom asked today. It may be useful, however, to reflect on it for a moment, since ideas of history or historical categories – or whatever you wish to call them – can never be described without reference to their own intellectual history. This applies in particular to ideas of progress, as the present chapter will argue and other chapters will substantiate.

British historian Quentin Skinner touched on the problem of the history of ideas several decades ago in his now-famous article, ‘Meaning and understanding in the history of ideas.’ One of his primary objections to approaches like Bury’s centers on what he calls the ‘mythology of doctrines,’ in which all manner of opinions are erroneously attributed to writers of the past. In Skinner’s view, this is done in various ways, for example, by highlighting scattered and incidental remarks that support the idea being sought, so that opinions are attributed to an author that the author himself could never have supported.⁵

A related method (here Skinner disapprovingly quotes the pioneer of this approach, Arthur O. Lovejoy) is to trace the ‘morphology’ of a given idea or theory ‘through all the provinces of history in which it appears.’⁶ In this case, the ideal form of an idea or theory (e.g. equality, progress, the social contract) is taken as the metaphysical starting point. According to Skinner, whose article is not without a certain analytical fighting spirit, this leads to historical absurdity.

First there is the absurdity of an assumed anticipation of an idea. This way of thinking is easily illustrated in Bury. The latter maintains, for example, that Jean Bodin introduced a new theory of universal history during the sixteenth century that, with its triple periodization, anticipates Hegel’s classification into the Eastern, classical, and German worlds.⁷ Because the real influence of Bodin on Hegel is not demonstrated and the context of the two theories differs considerably, such a remark is groundless. A comparable absurdity is the notion that one can identify when a particular idea ‘really emerged.’ Here, too, Bury provides an excellent illustration. We constantly see him delving into an obscure and distant past in search of an idea that, in fact, only acquired meaning in the reality and discussions of his own time.

Skinner’s criticism, inspired by the later Wittgenstein, unmistakably cuts ice here. If the meaning of a concept is taken as an immutable idea that can be described independent of its historical context, a historical study of that mean-

ing becomes a perilous undertaking. But his criticism extends further. He posits that the study of the development of an idea or concept beyond the linguistically or socially determined practice of a limited period is altogether pointless, and thus denies any possibility of a history of ideas. Any such form of history would inevitably become subject to the fallacies he identifies.

But Skinner's historicism of ideas can be criticized in its own right.⁸ The first objection is a hermeneutic one. There is no reason why we should limit ourselves solely to 'how it really was.' It is perfectly legitimate to read a text from the past in order to better understand ideas or points of view from our own time – by either confronting them with that past or by seeing them as a continuation of it. Historical texts can help us to articulate our own ideas and assumptions, and therefore need not only be studied for their own sake.

There are, however, two even more important objections. To begin with, the description of a language game, context, practice, convention, or historical framework remains necessarily vague. Even a chronological demarcation is extremely problematic in this context. Many, if not all, texts deploy and describe ideas from an intellectual tradition that extends beyond those limits. The 'language game,' or the context of the discussions relevant to the history of ideas, consists, for the most part, precisely of those texts that fall outside the chronologically defined framework. The interpretation of a text from the past can never limit itself exclusively to the synchronic horizon of the writer.⁹

A no less serious objection is that Skinner's historicism of ideas renders every historical object arbitrary. His point of view precludes establishing broader links within the history of ideas. The past thus becomes no more than a few scattered pieces of text that, for want of coherence, are seemingly brought together for further study on only a random basis. It is in the word 'seemingly' that the core of the objection lies: both the choice of a particular subject for study and the formulation of the question through which that subject is approached remain largely implicit, and thus immune to reflection or criticism.

On the other hand, in Skinner's approach there are scarcely any reasons for limiting that choice. The historian is obliged to study a vast and diffuse amount of material because criteria for deciding what makes one text more important than another are virtually absent. Skinner's own study of political ideas during the Renaissance and the Reformation serves as an example. The large number of theories that he treats in *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, results in a fragmented picture, the inevitable price of the methodological purity that he is seeking.¹⁰ Moreover, the 'foundations' referred to in his title also provide food for thought: the critic himself apparently succumbs to the seduction of anticipation.

Historical research cannot be undertaken without establishing broader links. Whether through the so-called 'colligatory' concepts of W.H. Walsh, the

hermeneutic-metaphoric approach of historians like Hayden White, or the rehabilitation of the speculative theory of Huskell Fain, the integration of events – or texts, in the case of the history of ideas – is inevitable. One might wish, for example, to study Condorcet's idea of progress solely in the context of the decade during which he published his portrait of progress in the human spirit. But you would be doing him an injustice, since his essay is a culmination of numerous ideas that blossomed during the Enlightenment and that can only be clarified through the discussions that took place during that period. Conversely, you would be giving him too much credit if his comments were to be taken as totally unique. It is even questionable whether knowledge of the biographical and political circumstances would enhance one's understanding of his *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1795). Concordet's unlimited faith in the perfectibility of man in fact becomes bizarre when we consider the circumstances under which the *Esquisse* was written: the Reign of Terror was at its height, and Concordet had gone into hiding; he was caught and committed suicide not long after the completion of this optimistic work.

The introduction of coherence into the history of ideas is inevitable. Foucault, whose approach has been so influential, tries to do it in a way that differs from the traditional historiographies. He concentrates on the use of language in texts from the past. In his view, it is not the intentions of the writer that are foremost but the structure of the discourse, that is, the way the writing and the speaking manifest themselves in a particular society during a particular period. As an 'episteme,' or framework, the relatively stable structure of this discourse has a far-reaching and epistemologically, anthropologically, and sociologically relevant impact. A close study of the discourse does not limit itself to single events. Nor does it lead to forms of historicism that render the history of ideas infertile. Instead, Foucault writes,

... it is in squeezing the individual event, in directing the resolving power of historical analysis onto official price-lists (mercurials), title deeds, parish registers, to harbour archives analysed year by year and week by week, that we gradually perceive – beyond battles, decisions, dynasties and assemblies – the emergence of those massive phenomena of secular or multi-secular importance.¹¹

Foucault resists the notion of continuity emphasized in most histories of ideas. Instead, aided by the monolithic characterization of his epistemes, he introduces radical discontinuities. However, because of the rigidity of these fault lines, he either overlooks a number of phenomena or over-accentuates them: distortions arise that would make all but the most radical historical relativists balk.¹² Moreover, especially in the history of thought, 'obsolete' opinions and concepts continually reappear without ever totally losing the mean-

ing they had acquired in an earlier context or practice. The belief in complete paradigmatic change therefore always seems somewhat contrived.

Skinner and Foucault's criticism of the traditional history of ideas is largely justified, and convincingly finishes with that history's hidden notions of progress. But the result is still rather meager when we attempt, as they did, to identify the historical discussions in which the ideas of progress emerged that persist today. It is precisely here that the history of concepts (*Begriffsgeschichte*) of German historian, philosopher, and sociologist Reinhart Koselleck is of value. Koselleck's lexicon, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (Fundamental Historical Concepts), which he edited together with fellow German historians Otto Brunner and Werner Conze, offers an overview of some 150 concepts important to the science of history, and meticulously describes the shifting meaning of those concepts between 1750 and 1850.¹³ Although Koselleck does not escape all Skinner's objections in this context, he does manage to show how to give meaningful form to the history of ideas, by combining a thorough empirical study of diverse source materials – including classical texts, political speeches, dictionaries, and legal texts – with a historical analysis of ideas.¹⁴

Here and in other work, as will now be described, Koselleck assumes a useful position, between the overly kaleidoscopic historicism of ideas and Skinner's nominalism, on the one hand, and the conceptual realism of historians like Bury, on the other. Although the transition to a modern, 'historical' time can be seen as a kind of fault line throughout his work, he does not lapse into the discontinuity schemes of Foucault's epistemes. Moreover, his empirical studies of diverse source material and his semantic analyses of that material rival Foucault's.

Koselleck: the history of ideas of progress

Koselleck's *Vergangene Zukunft* (1979; *Futures Past*) begins with the description of a painting by Albrecht Altdorfer depicting the Battle of Issus (333 B.C.).¹⁵ This painting, from 1529, portrays Alexander the Great's victory over the Persians. An anachronism that would immediately be noticed today is the fact that the Persians are outfitted 'from turban to foot' in the sixteenth-century garb and weaponry of the Turks, who were standing before the gates of Vienna in 1529. As Koselleck puts it, in the sixteenth century this was not seen as a discrepancy; present and past times were encompassed by a common historical horizon. Some three centuries later, Friedrich Schlegel described and admired the same painting from a completely different historical perspective. He saw in it the 'highest adventure of ancient chivalry,' thus distinguishing it from both his own time and from antiquity. So, Koselleck wonders, what has changed in the intervening centuries in our experience of 'geschichtliche Zeit' (*historical time*)?

Koselleck attempts to describe this new experience of 'historical time' – a concept that emerged during the eighteenth century and gave rise to several new historical concepts, including progress – from several points of view.¹⁶ His careful treatment of this complex change can be summarized in terms of five characteristics, all relevant to ideas of progress.

1. One striking change in the common experience of history was the gradual disintegration of Christian apocalyptic thought. While doubts arose about the Day of Judgment as the end of worldly history, a linear sense of time with an open future began to gain ground.¹⁷ That the inevitability of the day of reckoning came under fire is apparent from the role it began to play in the idea of the Apocalypse as borrowed from the Book of Revelation. During the Reformation and related religious disputes, the Day of Judgment was frequently proclaimed as imminent, only to be postponed again shortly thereafter. As a result of this inconsistency, history gradually lost its eschatological meaning. The eschatological function of the Holy Roman Empire also slowly declined in the wake of international political developments. A new distinction, like the one Bodin made between sacred, human, and natural histories, became possible. At the same time, resistance continued to grow against all kinds of religious and political predictions, initially manifesting itself in the emerging ideology of the absolute state (which sought to combat the destabilizing effects of such predictions) and in the humanist tradition. Literary and philosophical resistance to all forms of prophecy and soothsaying could be heard – from Montaigne and Bacon, through Spinoza and Fontenelle, to Voltaire, whose sarcasm 'is ultimately only the mockery of a conqueror.'¹⁸

With the disappearance of the expectation of a Day of Judgment, new attitudes toward the future became possible. In political thought, a rational prognosis thus emerged in which events were no longer seen as symbols, as in the prophetic tradition, or tested against the Day of Judgment, but various rationally arguable possibilities were allowed for. The changing sense of the future robbed time of its static character; acceleration and deceleration, and with them the possibility of influencing more global historical processes, could now be conceived of. This realization paved the way for new ideas of progress. The concept of the acceleration of time, once an eschatological category, was transformed into a call for an earthly future; people wanted to (and thought they could) achieve what was better faster. They also believed they could influence that process.

2. Koselleck characterizes the changing experience of 'historical time' by what he calls the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous.'¹⁹ During the course of the seventeenth century, but particularly during the eighteenth century, more extensive and intensive contacts were made with other continents and civilizations. The increasing interest in primitive cultures repeatedly resulted in a historical comparison with one's own culture, and thus in a

sense of non-contemporaneity, which occurred both chronologically and at the same time. Some peoples or civilizations – especially, of course, one’s own culture or those cultures most closely related to it – were seen as being more or further advanced, despite the fact that confrontation with another culture might also reveal a decline in one’s own culture, as Rousseau envisaged in his *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750).

A similar perspective on time emerges in descriptions of the state of the different sciences and paradigms, for example, in the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772). There important men were said to be *ahead of their time*, while the *as yet* unenlightened masses still had things *to catch up on* (with the aid of education). The Encyclopedists in particular developed a kind of grid based on this notion of history, in which different but comparable points in time, developments, and time strata structured ideas of progress. In this grid a universal history takes place.

The ‘contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous’ marks a new way of experiencing time. The dynamic of similar developments taking place in different tempos, that is, of non-contemporaneous developments taking place in the same period, makes progress into a historical experience. This dynamic plays an ongoing role in the discussions on progress, especially when the tension between cognitive and moral development becomes an issue, a problem Friedrich Schlegel formulates in his critique of Condorcet’s *Esquisse*:

*The real problem of history is the inequality in the progression of the different components of universal human development, especially the great discrepancy in the degree of intellectual and moral development.*²⁰

Kant, too, noticed this discrepancy. ‘We are *civilized* – perhaps too much for our own good – in all sorts of social grace and decorum,’ he wrote. ‘But to consider ourselves as having reached *morality* – for that, much is lacking.’²¹ A similar tension arises when cognitive and aesthetic experiences of development are compared, as my next chapter will reveal.

3. Another striking feature of the new experience of time as ‘historical time’ is the formulation of a number of political, social, and historical-theoretical terms in the form of the so-called ‘collective singular’ (*Kollektivsingular*).²² In his *Historia Magistra Vitae*, Koselleck describes how the use of the word *Geschichte* (history) in the singular form increasingly took the place of the word *Historie* during the eighteenth century (in Germany). The emphasis shifted semantically from the event to the occurrence, from the reporting to a process of universal coherence. With this shift, the exemplary role of history as *magistra vitae* declined. If history has taught us anything, it is the extent to which *Historie* has been abandoned.

Prior to that time, *Geschichte* had been used mostly in the plural (‘histo-

ries'), but around 1770 it acquired, in its new singular form, the meaning of an autonomous category that brought together related processes. In this sense history, particularly since the French Revolution, also became a subject, for example, where Hegel speaks of 'the work of history' (*Arbeit der Geschichte*). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, such presuppositions about the 'work' of history became prominent with the rise of Marxist thought.

Use was also made of this collective singular in a number of other historical, political, and social categories: from revolutions, Revolution was now distilled; from freedoms, Freedom; and from progressions (*les progrès; die Fortschritte*), Progress (*le progrès; der Fortschritt*).²³

4. The new experience of 'historical time' revealed itself further in an altered reciprocal relationship between past and present. In his essay "'Erfahrungsraum" und "Erwartungshorizont" – zwei historische Kategorien' ("Space of experience" and "horizon of expectation": two historical categories'), Koselleck describes a growing separation between 'experience' from the past and 'expectation' for the future.²⁴ The 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation' are not symmetrical historical categories like the past and the future. What has already taken place presents itself in a structurally different way than what could be expected. Koselleck does not use the metaphor of 'space' simply to tally up a continuing series of events, for memory is necessarily selective and creates a prehistory using only a very limited rationality. Instead, he uses it to show how, in the present, the past is experienced as a whole in which many layers of past eras coexist. As for the future, Koselleck uses the 'horizon' metaphor to show how the future continually moves up to make room for new realms of experience. He illustrates this with an anecdote about Khrushchev. In a speech, the latter once claimed that communism was already visible on the horizon. When a listener asked, 'Comrade Khrushchev, what does "horizon" mean?', the leader advised him to consult a dictionary. There, the listener found the following entry: 'Horizon, an apparent line that separates the earth from the sky and disappears as you approach it.'

The 'horizon of expectation' is only partly structured by experience; events do not always coincide with expectations, although those expectations are, of course, strongly influenced by their prehistory in the 'space of experience.' In the modern world, this tension between experience and expectation evokes a different experience of history. Partly because of the disintegration of the Christian concept of the Judgment Day, the 'horizon of expectation' moves up, and the future becomes 'less attached' to the past. At the same time, an eventual improvement of one's fate is less likely 'in the hereafter' and more likely 'in the present,' an experience that manifests itself in the emerging use of the concept of 'progress.'

5. Lastly, the new experience of 'historical time' is characterized by the altered pragmatic dimension, in which historically and politically relevant

concepts begin to play a role.²⁵ Many of these concepts acquire an ideological weight that seeks to justify action by appealing to prospects for the future. In this context, the so-called ‘-isms’ arise, new words like – in Germany – *Republikanismus* (first used in Kant), *Demokratismus* (Schlegel), and later, among others, *Liberalismus*, *Sozialismus*, and *Kommunismus*. All of these concepts suggest a relationship between past and future in their meaning. Koselleck clarifies this when he observes, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, that it is only late in the nineteenth century, and reluctantly at that, that the conservatives start operating under the motto of *Konservatismus*, in order to ‘avoid the coercion of time that is implied by the dynamic constraint of the term.’²⁶ Many concepts start to develop a different meaning and become ‘time-bound.’ Concepts like ‘revolution’ and ‘emancipation’ no longer refer to (the whole of) actions during a limited period. Instead, from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward, they designate historical and political categories of change that have an ideological connotation.

As a slogan (*Schlagwort*), ‘progress’ also acquires a moral and political implication, thus becoming an appealing, prescriptive category of activity. Whoever situates his own ideas or activities within the historical perspective of progress gives them the stamp of approval, the illusion of inevitability. The label of progress justifies action through its appeal to the course of history.

In his description of those concepts linked to ‘historical time,’ Koselleck attributes an important role to the collective singular form of the word ‘progress.’ By studying the development of this concept in similar contexts in conjunction with other related concepts, he presents a clear picture of its emergence and use until well into the nineteenth century. Naturally, Koselleck’s *Kollektivsingular* in no way implies that a metaphysical concept of progress was indirectly smuggled in that can be considered independent of its context. What will become clear, though, is that the characteristics mentioned above continue even today to have far-reaching implications for ideas of progress.

The value of Koselleck’s undertaking lies in the historically productive middle road he maps out – between Skinner’s nominalism and the conceptual realism of many classical historians of ideas. In this respect, justice is done to what, in intellectual history, is called the ‘context,’ ‘practice,’ or entirety of conventions, without the historical study at all becoming totally random. On the one hand, Koselleck’s work now makes it possible to sail around the rock of Scylla with its hybrid monster and, in the process, to avoid those forms of historicism that lead to disintegration and structuralism, and ultimately the latter’s distorting and exaggerated cut-off lines. On the other hand, the whirlpool of the water-spewing Charybdis can also be circumvented, thereby avoiding the danger of an overly global and universal historiography lacking in historical relevance.

Ideas of progress and related categories of change

The course has now been plotted for a brief history of ideas of progress in the arts. However, unlike Foucault, the next two chapters will not ‘squeeze[e] the individual event’ to the minimum. Nor will they unravel Koselleck’s legal texts and lexicons. Instead, ideas of progress will be distilled from the work of thinkers, writers, critics, and artists. But, first, we must briefly return to that impressive nineteenth-century concept of progress. The way ‘progress’ is used, right up to today, refers time and again to this monolithic concept, so beautifully symbolized by Krupp’s steel block. In nineteenth-century Germany, the concept of *Fortschritt* was omnipresent as ‘a political motto and an unquestioned, ubiquitous Leitmotif.’²⁷ The concept was also used readily in other Western countries. When someone entered her house, the Victorian Lady Carlisle would say: ‘If anyone comes into my house who doesn’t believe in progress, out he must go.’²⁸ A similar joke made today would be much more provocative because we think we have left this concept behind. Although ideas of progress had become so commonplace during the nineteenth century that no one even noticed them anymore, the later disavowal of what I called in the introduction the ‘hydra of Progress’ was still in its infancy. Precisely because of its omnipresence, this concept vanished as an entry in the lexicons, and was used to refer to the most diverse of undertakings, from magazines to milk factory cooperatives.

Nineteenth-century ideas of progress reveal the extent to which historical categories like development and evolution had begun to interfere with the concept of progress. Generally, the prevailing view was that changes in the most diverse fields – ranging from industry, morality, technology, science, and politics to the arts – could be seen as a coherent process.²⁹ This belief that everything should be interpreted as part of a process or development derives from two different cultural traditions which are called, somewhat exaggeratedly, the ‘Enlightenment’ and ‘Romanticism.’

The Enlightenment adhered to the belief that reality totally conformed to *laws*, whether these were natural processes or developments in human civilization. In contrast to, for example, the metaphysical principles of German idealism, the doctrine of Newtonian and materialist Saint-Simon was a universal law of human perfectibility. Auguste Comte, originally Saint-Simon’s secretary, later developed these ideas into what became his famous positivist model. This model defines various necessary stages according to which the civilizing pattern of *all* humanity develops. Events are understood as elements of an inevitable process, and that inevitability is not entirely free of teleological principles. These principles are also found in the laws of Marx and Engels, although there they are based on the Hegelian tradition, in which finalism is much more clearly implied.

Romanticism, beginning with such disparate thinkers as Rousseau and

Herder, rejected these ideas of laws, basing its thought on a developmental factor called *growth*. Herder, for example, in his characterization of history, used a tree metaphor to portray the 'organic' nature of human history as divine immanence. He chose the word *Entwicklung* (development) precisely for its biological connotations. Nevertheless, in his day it was often used synonymously, along with concepts like *Fortgang* (progress), *Fortschreiten* (progressing), *Fortbildung* (continuing education), and *Progression* (progression).³⁰

Closely related to these two forms of historicism is the concept of *evolution*, which, despite its biological origins, has an evaluative connotation. As the famous conclusion of *The Origin of Species* reveals, Darwin's concept of the *survival of the fittest* also implied a progressive development in all of nature that brought increasing value and beauty:

*Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object which we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.*³¹

Where this evolutionary model was applied to cultural history, the concept of progress resounded more clearly than ever, whether in the total evolutionism of someone like Spencer or in the social evolutionism of scientists like Morgan and Tylor.

In this family of ideas of progress, three elements recur. A cohesive process is described in which the relevant changes generally move in the same direction and also extend into the future, there is an accumulation of achievements, and there is a visible improvement according to general standards.³² These elements will be discussed at length in the following chapters.

The related term of 'modernization' will also be considered in this context. This term was used much later and, like the concept 'modern,' played a significant role in the description of historical processes. It is worth noting that the concept 'modern' emerged during the nineteenth century primarily in an aesthetic context, and that expressions like 'modern' and 'modernity' continue to have a strong aesthetic connotation today.³³ All this would seem to suggest that now is the right moment to turn to a discussion of the history of ideas of progress in the arts.

2 From the Ancients and the Moderns: A Door to the Future

Those involved with the history of ideas often find it difficult to resist the temptation of searching for a beginning – or even *the* beginning – of an idea in antiquity. We see this in Bury, but even in a more contemporary scholar like René Wellek. In his article on the evolution of literature, Wellek attempts to find a starting point in Aristotle, whom he cites as follows: ‘From its early form tragedy was developed little by little as the authors added what presented itself to them. After going through many alterations, tragedy ceased to change, having come to its full natural stature.’¹ A few lines later, Wellek relativizes this image of Aristotle as an early literary historian on an evolutionary basis because, according to him, until the eighteenth century there was no such thing as a systematic approach to literary history. This relativization is, of course, justified, because Aristotle’s idea of ‘evolution’ – equally inadequately referred to by others as ‘development’ and ‘progress’ – was about the Aristotelian actualization of form, which already existed in potential, and not about the history of literature, which, after all, did not exist as such in his day.² Aristotle’s idea of development has little to do with notions of evolution, development, or progress as they began to emerge during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Similarly, one philosophy dictionary claims that ‘according to Aristotle, progress belongs essentially to the arts,’ but the same passage in fact says little other than that features can be thought up in the same way as a drawing can be filled in.³ Such examples demonstrate yet again that this kind of realism has no historical or empirical relevance. But, as I argued in the previous chapter, for those wishing to identify the ideas of progress in and about the arts that have played a role in the past, the nominalistic or purely historical approach is just as inadequate. Where, then, is the correct middle road, the best place to begin? In my view, the plumb line should be dropped further back in history than in the transition period where, according to Koselleck, a new perspective on the past emerged that was based on the idea of ‘historical time’ – but not too far back. Not, for example, in what is often called the first specimen of art history, namely Vasari’s famous *Le vite de’ più eccellenti architetti, pittori e scultori Italiani de Cimabue insino a’ tempi nostri* (1550; *The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*). This study describes the lives and work of numerous artists as a progressive develop-

ment. This is why it is important. But, in the end, it is based on both a finalistic and cyclical concept of time. In Vasari's view, history completed itself at the apex of its development – in the form of Michelangelo's work – thus recovering from its decline since antiquity.

I believe a better place to begin the history of ideas of progress in the arts is at the end of the seventeenth century. Many historians who have studied this history have devoted much attention – albeit usually for the wrong reasons, as will become clear – to the Querelle between the Ancients and the Moderns that was taking place at the time. The Querelle is often considered crucial in such histories, for example, in Bury, or, more recently, in P.B.M. Blaas, who claims that it is here 'the so-called *idea of progress* originated' that 'made it possible to explain history "progressively"'.⁴

One reason to begin with this controversy is precisely because the arts occupied such a central place in it. Other reasons will emerge in future chapters. For now, it is important to identify the focus of this dispute – only acknowledged again as important in the nineteenth century thanks to the positivist and prophet-of-progress Auguste Comte – and to assess the extent to which the Moderns argued that there was such a thing as progress in the arts.

The Querelle between the Ancients and the Moderns

The Querelle, primarily centered in France, focused on the question of whether man at the time could measure up to his illustrious predecessors from antiquity. The question appears deceptively simple, but a quick look at the debate is enough to reveal its true complexity.⁵

The beginning of the Querelle is generally attributed to a meeting of the Académie Française held on 27 January 1687, devoted to a discussion of Charles Perrault's *Poème sur le siècle de Louis le Grand*, an ode to that era. In that poem, Perrault put writers of his time on a par with the classical greats. Better known today as the author of *Tales of Mother Goose* (1697), Perrault left little room for doubt on this count, as the opening lines of his poem demonstrate:

*La belle Antiquité fut toujours venerable,
Mais je ne crus jamais qu'elle fust adorable.
Je voy les Anciens sans plier les genoux,
Ils sont grands, il est vray, mais hommes comme nous.*⁶

His proposition evoked criticism from those who believed that Greek and Roman literature was an example worth emulating, but also perfect and hence unsurpassable. After Perrault's poem had been read aloud, the celebrated

poet Boileau is said to have jumped up and shouted how scandalous it was that the Académie should have to listen to such a work.

In reality, this discussion was not entirely new. For decades the question had been posed of whether Christian themes were suitable for epic poems inspired on antiquity. Boileau opposed the adaptation of classical mythology for Christian use, as in Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin's *Clovis ou la France chrétienne* (1657). This discrepancy reflects the core of one major controversy in the Querelle: the Moderns believed the classical writers could be improved upon, and maintained, at least initially, that Christian-inspired poetry should be seen as superior to literature based on heathen mythology. Their opponents, on the other hand – after Boileau, especially La Fontaine and La Bruyère – defended the hegemony of antiquity against the claims of the day and against Christian heroism in the tradition of the Counter-Reformation. Within this context, the famous fabulist La Fontaine defended himself against the reproach of slavish imitation voiced by Perrault in his *Poème sur le siècle de Louis le Grand*. He, too, attended that memorable meeting of the Académie, but in contrast to Boileau's choleric reaction (no doubt also evoked because he was not among the contemporary greats referred to by Perrault), he seems only to have nodded off. Nevertheless, a few days later he presented an *épître* (epistle) to Huet, Bishop of Soissons, from which the following lines, representative of the attitude adopted by those who defended the Ancients, are taken:

*On me verra toujours pratiquer cet usage:
Mon imitation n'est pas un esclavage.
Je ne prends que l'idée, et les tours, et les lois
Que nos maîtres suivaient eux-mêmes autrefois.*

About his own century, he wrote:

*Je le loue, et je sais qu'il n'est pas sans mérite;
Mais près de ces grands noms notre gloire est petite.⁷*

Some historians situate the beginning of the Querelle around 1620, when Tassoni in Italy began to resist Petrarch, so highly esteemed in the Renaissance, together with Aristotle and Homer. Tassoni's *Pensieri diversi* (Diverse Thoughts) was translated into French and probably influenced Boisrobert's 1635 attack on Homer, who was to become one of the main targets of the Moderns.⁸

Subsequently, in his *Poème sur le siècle de Louis le Grand*, Perrault claimed the so-called unsurpassable Homer would have written much better if he had lived during the era of Louis XIV. This point of view, along with other claims made by the Moderns, reflects a strong sense of self, a confident culture that

was rapidly expanding, at a time when the power of countries like Spain and the Italian states was waning. Why should the grandeur of the era and the culture of the Sun King not be compared with that of Caesar Augustus?

*Et l'on peut comparer sans craindre d'estre injuste,
Le Siecle de Louis au beau Siecle d'Auguste.*⁹

It was precisely such a comparison that Perrault attempted to make in his extensive work *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (1688-1697). Here, in the form of dialogues, he examines in detail the advances made in the fields of knowledge and the various arts. In his view, people were not becoming cleverer or better, any more than lions in Africa had become more tame than they were at the time of Alexander the Great. Instead, the quality of artistic and cognitive performances had changed because they were built on advances made by predecessors. In this way, the plays by his contemporary Corneille contained more balanced and subtle reflections on human passions than those from antiquity. And, just as a traveler arriving at Gibraltar no longer believed he had reached the end of the world when he saw the Pillars of Hercules and thus sailed on, so Molière was much livelier than Horace, substantiated the action much better, and had a broader perspective. And, to cite one last example from Perrault, in antiquity the achievements of polyphony were still utterly unknown.¹⁰

In his *Parallèle*, Perrault made an impressive attempt to be comprehensive. In five dialogues appearing in four separate volumes over a period of nine years, he compared the achievements of antiquity with those of his own day, in the fields of the visual arts (architecture, sculpture, painting), oratory, literature ('La Poésie'), and the sciences, or, as he called them in his table of contents, 'de l'Astronomie, de la Géographie, de la Navigation, de la Guerre, de la Philosophie, de la Musique, de la Médecine, etc.' Each time, the modern era came out on top. The only exception – and, as we shall see, it was a significant one – was made for *Poésie* and *Eloquence*, as his conclusion reveals:

*Nous concluons, si vous l'avez agreable que dans tous les Arts & dans toutes les sciences, à la reserve de l'Eloquence & de la Poésie, les Modernes sont de beaucoup superieurs aux Anciens, comme je croy l'avoir prouvé suffisamment, & qu'à l'égard de l'Eloquence & de la Poésie, quoy-qu'il n'y ait aucune raison d'en juger autrement, il faut pour le bien de la paix ne rien decider sur cet article.*¹¹

In his plea for the Moderns, Perrault found a supporter in Fontenelle, a fervent admirer of Descartes. Fontenelle, in his influential pamphlet *Digression sur les anciens et le modernes* (1688), argued that his own era could never be worth less, as the supporters of the Ancients claimed, because nature always

uses the same material, with the same ‘force.’ He illustrated the problem in the opening sentence of his pamphlet:

*Toute la question de la prééminence entre les anciens et les modernes étant une fois bien entendue, se réduit à savoir si les arbres qui étaient autrefois dans nos campagnes étaient plus grands que ceux d’aujourd’hui.*¹²

If trees have not changed since antiquity, he maintained, in this fine specimen of rationalist argumentation, why should people? The Ancients invented and discovered a number of things, not because they were better but because they lived earlier. Otherwise, he went on, you could just as easily praise them for being the first to drink from our rivers and accuse us of only drinking what is left in them now. Basically, people living at different times have the same possibilities, and a natural equality (*égalité naturelle*) should therefore be assumed. Although, like many seventeenth-century thinkers, Fontenelle believed that climate could affect the nature of a culture, this argument – of his opponents – only led him to assert that Laplanders and Negroes were probably unable to master the Greek spirit, whereas in the temperate regions of Greece, Italy, and France, the climate differed too little to actually affect this *égalité naturelle*.

But, like Perrault, Fontenelle wavered on the question of whether the literature of his day surpassed that of the Ancients. This doubt resurfaced in the English counterpart of the Querelle that flourished during the final decades of the seventeenth century, under the influence of the discussions in France. Despite his faith in the advancement of knowledge, Wotton, one of the major proponents of the British Moderns, remained reserved where literature was concerned.¹³ The debates in England produced few new perspectives and were fuelled more by the French debates than the other way around. Nor did Jonathan Swift’s famous *Battle of the Books*, a satire on the controversies between the *Antients* and the *Moderns*, offer any new arguments. Instead, it revealed the extent to which the comparison between the classical greats and contemporaries was viewed as a competition in which the possibility of different historical perspectives was not really considered a problem.¹⁴

In Swift’s story, the spirits of the books come to life one Friday in St. James’s Library, where they fight out a terrible war. Virgil, Lucan, Homer, Aesop, and countless other Ancients feel compelled to take a stand against modern writers like Descartes and Hobbes, as well as against participants in the debate like Bentley and Wotton, whom Swift portrays as pathetic. In the heat of the battle, somewhat reminiscent of an ordinary brawl in a cheap western, Paracelsus fights Galen, while Homer struggles with Perrault and Fontenelle, who, in Swift’s eyes, offer little resistance:

*Then Homer slew W-s-l-y with a kick of his Horse's heel; He took Perrault by mighty Force out of his Saddle, then hurl'd him at Fontenelle, with the same Blow dashing out both their Brains.*¹⁵

Later in the Querelle, the battle over Homer, which had already begun during the first half of the seventeenth century, flared up again. In 1714, Houdar de La Motte, a combatant for the Moderns, published a new version of the Iliad in verse, prefaced by an ode called 'Ombre d'Homère.' In this ode, Homer descends to Earth and invites La Motte to undertake the task of improving the *Iliad*, because

*Mon siècle eut des dieux trop bizarres,
Des héros d'orgueil infectés,
Des rois indignement avarés,
Défauts autrefois respectés.*¹⁶

The words La Motte puts into Homer's mouth echo what Perrault, among others, had claimed in his *Poème sur le siècle de Louis le Grand*. In the so-called 'Querelle d'Homère,' which flourished after 1700, the opinions of the Moderns acquired greater depth and detail, but by then the most important insights and perspectives had already been mapped out.

A new look at an old question

At the end of his *Digression*, Fontenelle evokes the traditional metaphor for human life – the successive stages, from infant to wise old man – as the metaphor for mankind's continual learning process. The comparison is only partially valid, he writes, because mankind knows no old age in this sense:

*It will always remain able to do those things that it could in its youth; and become even more able to do those things associated with adulthood. That is to say – to dispense with the metaphor [L'allégorie] – that people will never degenerate, and that the beneficent insights of all the great minds that have come to us one after the other will continue to accumulate.*¹⁷

The metaphor for life's journey had already been questioned by Francis Bacon in his *Novum Organum* (1620). According to Bacon, the ancient Greeks and Romans may seem older because they are our forebears, but at the same time, the later generations *are* older because they are more experienced and have learned more.¹⁸ In the latter case, the metaphor for life's journey also implies the decay and degeneration of old age, but as the advocate of a perspective

with an open future in which knowledge steadily accumulates, Fontenelle resisted this, as the above passage demonstrates.

In the historiography of ideas of progress, such passages become more important than they were in the context of their original discussions. This is why conceptual realists like Bury are surprised

*that in this literary controversy the Moderns, even Fontenelle, seem curiously negligent of the import of the theory which they were propounding of the intellectual progress of man.*¹⁹

Fontenelle's explicit break with the metaphor for the stages of life is, of course, important, but his *Digression* remains primarily a treatise on the merits of his day compared with those of antiquity, a 'battle of books' rather than a historiographical essay.

More recent views on the Querelle relativize the image developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, of a period in which ideas of progress ostensibly reached their near-ultimate form. Auguste Comte claimed it was during the time of the Querelle when notions of 'necessary and continuous progress' actually acquired a 'philosophical consistency.' According to him, it was during this 'solemn discussion' that the 'fundamental progress' of history was affirmed for the first time in the universal history of human reasoning.²⁰

But Comte's idea of progress gradually lost ground. In 1935, Paul Hazard, in *The European Mind, 1680-1715*, his classic work on the early years of the Enlightenment – which, notably, pays relatively little attention to the Querelle even though it falls exactly within the period he is examining and, moreover, takes place primarily in France – describes how *the present* comes to occupy center-stage during that time. In the late seventeenth century, man disposes in various ways of a past that had already served as a model for too long.²¹ The preoccupation with a changing attitude toward history is, in that sense, not just attributable to the Moderns, but equally, if not more so, to the Ancients, the defenders of antiquity. One might even go so far as to say that for some Moderns (not including Fontenelle), history did not begin in their day but ended, because they saw their own time as a kind of final stage in which various achievements from the past were there for the taking, while, at the same time, the future offered no new prospects. In this sense, one might even call them the Postmoderns of their day.

The relationship between the Ancients and the Moderns is often paradoxical where notions of progress are concerned. Initially, for example, the Moderns claimed that man remains basically the same over time, while at a later stage in the Querelle, the Ancients used this same argument to demonstrate the greatness of the achievements of antiquity. The Ancients thus later

endorsed a viewpoint that the Moderns had propagated earlier on, namely, that aesthetic qualities should be considered within the context of their own time – an old idea that is strikingly ‘modern.’ Likewise, it is paradoxical that the foremost proponents of the Ancients, La Fontaine and Boileau, were in fact ‘modern,’ for, precisely on the basis of the literary accomplishments of these two Ancients, Perrault would have been able to show that his own era had produced better work than antiquity.

Numerous such nuances can be found in H.R. Jauss’s insightful essay ‘Ästhetische Normen und geschichtliche Reflexion in der “Querelle des Anciens et des Moderns”’ (‘Aesthetic Norms and Historical Reflection in the “Querelle between the Ancients and the Moderns”’), published as the introduction to the historical-critical facsimile edition of Perrault’s *Parallèle*.²² In his essay, Jauss dispenses once and for all with the myth that the Moderns had created a new way of thinking about history because they began viewing the past, present, and future through the lens of progress. He maintains that throughout the entire debate, and in arguments on both sides, a new idea of history began to emerge, an idea that, moreover, he later sees as resulting in the historical discourse of Romanticism rather than in early nineteenth-century positivism and evolutionism, as most historiographies of ideas of progress posit.

Jauss also pays more attention to the aesthetic dimension of the Querelle. According to him, the Moderns, like the Ancients, generally stayed within the confines of a humanistic ideal of perfection. This ideal was at odds with later ideas of progress, because perfection was a static concept understood independently of its historical context and precluding an open future with various possibilities. In this perspective, the arts and sciences would one day reach a point in which perfection was achieved and after which further perfection would no longer be possible. This is why one cannot attribute to the Moderns what Koselleck, a decade after Jauss, called ‘historical time.’ In the historical experience of time of the participants of the Querelle, there was still no such thing as a distinction between the ‘space of experience’ and the ‘horizon of expectation,’ to use Koselleck’s terminology, or of a linear conception of time with an open future.²³

In Jauss’s reading, the ideal of perfection was central to both the Ancients and the Moderns. They differed only as to when they thought that perfection was achieved: the Ancients believed it was during antiquity, the Moderns thought it was toward the end of (their own) history – during the era of the Sun King. Both parties had a similar perspective on the landscape of history, but perceived a different peak.

New to the historiography of the Querelle is Jauss’s observation that in various debates, a shift slowly took place from *imitatio* to *inventio*, from the idea that perfection could only be achieved through the imitation of an absolute ideal, whether achieved or not, to the belief that new things can and should be

created with the help of the imagination. Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin had already worked out the distinction between the *copiste* and the *inventeur*, whom he compares respectively with the one who draws water solely from the village pump and the one who draws from his own well. His esteem for creativity was a natural result of his admiration for the creative power of God, who, after all, was responsible for everything that already existed precisely because of that power.

The importance of the shift toward *inventio* is illustrated in Perrault's *Parallèle*. There, one of the protagonists challenges the ideal of perfection by resisting the notion that it can be achieved only by imitating an absolute ideal. Instead, he suggests that the criteria for perfection depend on factors of time, that is, on the predominant *bon goût* of a particular period.²⁴ The classical ideal of beauty is therefore neither absolute nor immutable. Admittedly, it does contain universal elements, for example, where certain proportions are concerned or where functional principles dictated by nature are found in architecture; such elements are 'of all tastes, all countries, and all times.'²⁵ But, to a large degree, the ideal of beauty is relative, depending on taste and custom. The Ancients had, after all, distinguished between the Ionic, Doric, and Corinthian styles of building, not to speak of the many forms of eloquence found in antiquity. By means of such nuances, Perrault makes a distinction between 'relative beauty' (*beau relatif*) and 'universal and absolute beauty' (*beautés universelles et absolues*).

Jauss emphasizes the new concept of 'relative beauty,' and describes how this concept relates to evolving thought on creativity and imagination. If beauty is, indeed, not derived (exclusively) from an absolute and eternal ideal, then new values must be created. *Imitatio* gradually gives way to *inventio*, a change crucial to later opinions in and on the arts.²⁶

This farewell to the communal pump in favor of the private well had far-reaching consequences. In the first place, it facilitated the break with the straightjacket of inflexible rules that was beginning to make classicism feel so sterile. In his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (1719), Abbé Dubos became the spokesman for the numerous artists who were starting to experience the extensive rationalism and meticulously prescribed academic style as a hindrance, and who no longer wished to limit themselves to imitating genius.²⁷

More important, though, is the fact that this newly ascribed role of the imagination began to give the arts a character of their own. To the extent that the *inventio* ideal called upon the imagination, a distinction arose between science and crafts. This marked the disintegration of the traditional unity of the *artes liberales*, and the emergence, during the eighteenth century, of various autonomous artistic domains. It was only from this time that art began to manifest itself as an independent phenomenon in which creativity and beauty occupied a central place. The emergence of the aesthetic domain at the end of

the eighteenth century reveals itself in the use of the singular noun 'art,' which almost takes on the character of the collective singular in a Koselleckian sense, albeit not as a historical concept.

Finally, the new principle of *inventio* was also revolutionary for the perspective on history it offered. The future acquired a primarily open character owing to the ongoing possibility that new things could be thought up and experimented with. Because this consciousness was not compatible with a finalistic view of history, it became possible to formulate ideas of progress. On the one hand, the eighteenth century created an extensive past that was empirically studied, described, and classified, in an explosion of historical activity. On the other hand, a future full of uncertain contours suddenly emerged that invited an active participation in history.

In his treatment of the Querelle, Jauss clearly follows the fertile middle road for which I have pleaded. He focuses on an accurately described historical context, without ending up in a historically-dead-end street, which would limit the view of the immediate surroundings and obscure long-term developments. His essay shows that it is impossible to distil anything like 'the idea of progress' from the skirmishes of the Querelle, because history is more complex than the monolithic concept of 'progress' would suggest. In the first place, he argues, it would be farfetched to view the Moderns as advocates of such an idea. And, insofar as changing thought on the course of history was linked to the ideas of progress that emerged during the eighteenth century, it would be better to describe such changes in a broader context. Both Jauss's and Koselleck's views of the concept of progress make clear that there is no evidence of 'historical time' in the Querelle. Jauss's analysis implies the absence there of a linear concept of time with an open future, as well as of a distinction between the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation.' At the same time, though, Jauss cites from the Querelle those elements that will give shape to a new historical experience, namely, the relativization of absolute values within the context of one's own time and the belief in human creativity that will permanently change the structure of the future.

Jauss's description goes on to show that in and through the Querelle, a division gradually emerged between the domains of the sciences and the arts. He sees this, for example, in Fontenelle's distinction between 'things of the imagination' and 'methods of reasoning,' but also, and primarily, in the increasing attention to 'relative beauty.' The concept of *beau relatif*, together with the idea that 'art' must be *created* because the imitation of an absolute ideal no longer suffices, forms the heart of an aesthetic domain that emerges at the end of the eighteenth century.

This differentiation between the aesthetic and cognitive domains, and thus between dissimilar kinds of developments in the arts and sciences, is a manifestation of what Koselleck calls 'the contemporaneity of the non-contempora-

neous,' that is, of the experience that contemporary developments take place at different speeds.²⁸ This dynamic, together with the tension between developments of a moral and cognitive nature that were experienced as non-contemporaneous, would come to dominate thought on progress. In this sense, the history of the Querelle does have some relevance for the emergence of modern ideas of progress.

Perfection and perfectibility

The historical argumentation of the participants of the Querelle thus still moved primarily within the confines of the ideal of perfection. This ideal differed in content depending on the circumstances and the subject of discussion, but it remained the same in that it consistently excluded an open future. Whether or not the ideal is achieved, equalled, or even within reach in a near future, its *nature* is static because it meets contemporary criteria that are taken as unalterable givens. Once this is acknowledged, it becomes relevant to ask to what extent the 'idea of progress' actually reached its peak during the eighteenth century, as Bury and many others believed was the case.

For an eminent eighteenth-century historian like Voltaire, thought on history was still formulated mainly within the framework of cyclical theories. Although he asserted that the last of the four periods of flourishing that the past had known – the era of Louis XIV – had learned something from the three preceding periods, and that in that period 'human reason generally perfected itself,' he did not really go beyond the limits of a static ideal of beauty. This is clearly demonstrated at the beginning of his *Le siècle de Louis XIV*, where he writes:

*In these four blessed periods the arts were perfected, and in their service to an era, they are an example to future generations of the brilliance of the human spirit.*²⁹

According to Voltaire, various achievements of the spirit and of human ingenuity (*les arts*) reach their peak during a period of flourishing, and should, henceforth, be taken as an example for later generations, just as antiquity, in the view of the Ancients, offered its descendants the ideal norm for perfection.

It is impossible to give a brief and comprehensive picture of the vast number of ideas that emerged during the eighteenth century regarding development and eventual progress in the arts. A few examples will have to suffice. Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas on the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756) influenced and developed thought on aesthetics. It is worth mentioning not only for Burke's now-famous distinction between the sublime and the beautiful, but also for his attention to the role of

the imagination.³⁰ There were also numerous documents that responded either skeptically or dismissively to the idea of a universal development of culture, among which Rousseau's *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750). Significant here is the fact that parallel to the emergence of an aesthetic domain, the historiography of the arts gained a more autonomous character. In 1763, John Brown published a history of literature, or rather, poetry (the distinction between the two was not readily made until the Romantic period). In his *Dissertation on the Rise, Union and Power, the Progressions, Separations, and Corruptions of Poetry and Music*, he describes how the assumed original unity of song, dance, and poetry disintegrated with the appearance of new genres. This developmental perspective was viewed, however, as regression by Brown, who advocated a return to the original unity of the arts.³¹

Winckelmann's influential *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764; *History of Ancient Art*), published a year later, reflects a similar view. There we see a semi-autonomous development in the (visual) arts, but as with Brown, it is from a historical perspective based on cyclical time. For Winckelmann, too, believes that decline follows the culmination in antiquity of 'noble simplicity' and 'calm grandeur,' a peak he believes present-day art should again strive to achieve.

An examination of the way most Enlightenment thinkers interpreted the history of the arts – insofar as they actually considered it as separate from the development of science and technology – reveals that a cyclical view, or otherwise a finalistic progression, was nearly always assumed. In the cyclical view, periods were seen to rise gradually, then flourish and decline. In the finalistic view, history, mostly interpreted as linear, ended in a period that was either imminent or that had already emerged, and that was then later described as the necessary or logical end of several developments or stages.

An opening to the future in the form of a linear unlimited experience of time is barely discernible in the eighteenth century, no matter how much the *inventio* thought, the differentiation between science, art, and technology, and the resulting contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous was beginning to affect the cyclical and finalistic model. An example of the latter instability can be found in the cyclical view of history put forward by Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), known only marginally in his day but often regarded now as the father of modern history. His new science, elaborated in *Principi di una scienza nuova d'interno alla commune nature delle nazioni* (1725; *Principles of a new science of the common nature of nations*), divides progress in history into different periods. He does, however, emphasize – and in this sense he was 'modern' – that man himself shapes that history. This creative principle contradicts his otherwise cyclical description of various eras and his abiding faith in Providence.

A somewhat comparable finalistic and cyclical approach to the past is found in the work of economist, encyclopedist, and statesman Turgot (1727-1781), which was to have such a profound influence on Comte's periodic

thinking. Turgot sees the world as improving slowly but surely in a cyclical pattern. A similar ambivalence toward conceptions of history is found in Herder's *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-1791; Ideas for a philosophy of the history of mankind), which reveals cyclical and finalistic elements coupled with a growing inclination to break open the future.

Despite this disintegration of cyclical and finalistic tendencies, finalistic thought culminated shortly after 1800, in a form that turned out to be the beginning of a view of history that would have an influence until well into the twentieth century: Hegel's philosophy. To the later Hegel at least, art was the way 'the absolute spirit' observed itself in total freedom. Hegel identifies three different stages in the development of the arts. These stages are not just historical, in the empirical sense of the word, but derive equal meaning from their place in his dialectic construction. In the first stage, that of *symbolic* art (such as early Eastern cultures), the idea of the absolute spirit is suggested but not yet adequately expressed. In the second stage, of *classical* art, form and matter, idea and appearance totally converge. In the third stage, that of *romantic* art, the idea and the 'inwardness of heart' are so dominant that a new stage begins in which art as such is 'superseded' (*aufgehoben*), that is, eliminated *and* taken to a higher plane.³²

In Hegel's thought, development in art is seen as the expression of a more comprehensive dialectic process. This is where the later, increasingly important, view begins to emerge that art is an expression of one's own time, and that it must be so because it is impossible to escape the spirit of that time (*Zeitgeist*). Whoever gains or thinks he possesses deeper insight into the development of his own culture can, on that basis, ascertain that some art is outdated, in other words, *passé*.

It is impossible to do justice to Hegel's aesthetic theory in a few words; nor is that my intention. Suffice it to say that the famous dilemma of 'the end of history' also presents itself in Hegel with respect to the arts. Hans-Georg Gadamer describes the two problems as a continuation of each other. History, he says, does not end in Hegel, but neither does it develop 'as a progression, in the sense of a consciousness of freedom,' nor can it be seen in any way as progress. By the same token, the history of art does not end. Instead, in its final romantic stage, it no longer satisfies 'the highest need of the Spirit' (*das höchste Bedürfnis des Geistes*) and is thus subsumed by religion and philosophy.³³ No matter how this 'dissolution of the romantic art form' (*Auflösung der romantischen Kunstform*) is conceived, the finalistic inclination in Hegel's thought ultimately precludes a further development of the arts in the future. As long as the continuing existence of the arts themselves is not questioned, they will remain imprisoned in a 'Hegelian classicism.' In his article on Hegel's aesthetics, Gadamer has good reason to wonder how Hegel would have interpreted later developments, because, as he observes, since Hegel's day, 'the end of art will not allow itself to be prescribed in that way ...'³⁴

Hegel's dialectic focuses unwaveringly on perfection, where a well-defined perfection is the end-result of the total historical process. Initially, this would also seem to apply to the way Condorcet, the greatest eighteenth-century proponent of progress, describes human history. In his optimistic *Esquisse* (1795), he distinguishes ten periods in history.³⁵ Together, these form an all-encompassing world history, which, necessarily and – despite local and temporary regression – continually implies a steadily increasing perfection of humanity. The *Esquisse* describes this progress (*les progrès*) chronologically – from agricultural improvements, to the invention of the printing press, scientific discoveries, and increasing political freedom. At the beginning of his book, where, by way of exception, he uses the word *progrès* in the collective singular, Condorcet claims that all these achievements are the sum total of individual accomplishments:

*This progress [ce progrès] is subject to the same general laws, observable in the individual development [sic] of our faculties [facultés]; being the result of that very development [sic] considered at once in a great number of individuals united in society.*³⁶

Finalism is not entirely lacking in Condorcet, but nor is it prominent, as it is in Hegelian thought. Here a door to the future unquestionably opens. First, Condorcet explicitly locates his final period in an era that is still to come. And, although he describes this period rather extensively, the description tends to resemble a program that functions within the programmatic, politically tinted context suggested by Koselleck as characteristic of the new experience of time. Condorcet not only describes how the future *will* look, but also how it *should* look. Second, Condorcet's images of the ideal are dynamic, in contrast to the teleological dialectics of Hegel's system, where there is a metaphysical development of a Spirit that must return to itself. Condorcet speaks more frequently of *perfectionnement* (perfecting) than of *perfection*. According to him, the human species can be improved upon. He uses the morally weighted term *perfectibilité* that was introduced by Rousseau, a perfectibility that he understands to be undefined and therefore unlimited: a *perfectibilité indéfinie*.³⁷

Condorcet pays little attention to the arts in the *Esquisse*, but for him it is irrefutable that they progress in the same way as everything else. The fine arts *appear* to have reached perfection in antiquity, he writes, in an implicit commentary on the Querelle, but there is more to be said about

*the happy genius of the artist [heureux génie de l'artiste]; a distinction calculated to destroy those narrow limits to which the improvement of the fine arts has been restricted.*³⁸

Such turns of phrase illustrate the significance of *inventio* as a concept that would undermine the notion of perfectibility, the virtually undisputed starting point of the Querelle.

Condorcet mentions only a few classical writers, and does not touch on the other arts. He later cites Boccaccio's *Decameron* as an example of the increasing freedom of thought, an apparent reference to the book's amorous content, and refers to Petrarch, Dante, and Boccaccio (again) as perfecters of the Italian language, who, moreover, give aesthetic pleasure.³⁹ Only at the end of the *Esquisse*, in his description of the ninth and tenth periods, does he devote a few sentences to music, drawing, and literature (again), including theater. The fact that his era had no Raphaëls or Carraccis made him rather uneasy. But he does not attribute this to the decline of that art form; such results are acquired by mankind and thereby retained. Instead, he attributes it rather non-committally to 'political and moral changes.' Condorcet goes on to claim that the arts progress in conjunction with, as well as by means of, progress in scientific knowledge, though he barely elucidates on this.⁴⁰ In general, he moves rather uneasily in the new domain of the arts. In one paragraph, in which he localizes the perfection, according to literary standards, of various languages (a good example of Koselleck's principle of the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous'), the static ideal of 'taste sure and certain' that holds for antiquity *and* his own era reappears, an everlasting standard that is at odds with his idea of a *perfectibilité indéfinie*.⁴¹

This tension between the eternal and thus immutable beauty of the absolute and the achievements of the present era understood in terms of progress, which arose during the Querelle, tore the future open even more. Initially, attempts were made to bridge the gap between Ancients and the Moderns *in the past*, but such efforts changed the nature of time in such a way that light shone not only on the past, but also – and for the first time – on the future. As stated earlier, the increasing importance attached to the power of the imagination played a central role in these discussions. Man's creative powers brought a new horizon of expectation and, as a result of discussions on progress, stimulated the emergence of an independent aesthetic domain. This is not to say that at a given moment such a thing as the idea of 'progress in art' emerged. Rather it implies that ideas of progress and the identity of art began to develop simultaneously.

The tense relationship between an eternal beauty, based on absolute values, and the mutable, with its relative and transient character, was later to be consciously thematized by Baudelaire. The awareness of this tension is usually described as the beginning of what we call 'the modern,' as will become clear in the next chapter. First, however, let me say a few words about Romanticism.

3 From Romanticism to the Avant-Garde

During the eighteenth century, a past emerged that would be unlocked and classified by countless scientists. The empirical approach of the scientists exposed a hitherto inconceivable wealth of customs, events, rituals, natural phenomena, and art objects. From that time on, mankind had a history it could no longer ignore.

Thus the past came to occupy a prominent place in Romanticism. The Romantic thinkers, however, had little affinity with historical schemes such as Condorcet's. A linear and rational progression in history was the last thing they considered important. For them, the richness of the past lay in its otherness and strangeness rather than in what predictably preceded the here and now, in a distant era like the Middle Ages or antiquity rather than in the cursed, prosaic Enlightenment that preceded it. Such remote, distinct periods were usually manifestations of a golden age that had ended, but to which one could return with the aid of the imagination, drifting like the German Romantic writer Novalis's young Heinrich von Ofterdingen. But they could also constitute key eras in a national history, periods of flourishing in one's own culture. Dutch Romanticism, for example, produced its Golden Age, with Rembrandt and Frans Hals, and in English Romanticism, Sir Walter Scott revived the old ideals of chivalry in his historical novels. Such periods were studied for their own sake, so that the dominant ideas of the day had to speak for themselves, as Leopold von Ranke (1795-1886) argued, thereby proclaiming a kind of historicism that since then has never disappeared from history writing.

In short, the idea that a culture was continually developing and advancing found little support in Romanticism. Where this notion was avowed, skepticism was often voiced with regard to the arts. The English writers and poets thus thought scientific progress was achieved at the expense of literature and the imagination. To use Keats's words, the world was increasingly reduced to a 'dull catalogue of common things.'¹ Moreover, the discrepancies and inconsistencies described in the previous chapter also emerged, as in Friedrich Schlegel, who posited a never-ending historical progress that simultaneously embodied a cyclical process. A possible exception to this often unconscious reticence toward an open future was the work of Romantic writer Adam Müller (1779-1829). In his *Vorlesungen über deutsche Wissenschaft und Literatur*

(1806; *Lectures on German Science and Literature*), he resisted the idea of a golden era and the ideals of absolute beauty to which the Enlightenment had just said farewell. He believed that the merit of German writers, from Winckelmann to Friedrich Schlegel, lay in their describing the history of art and literature as a coherent whole rather than as a succession of independent, separate works of art. Nevertheless, Schlegel had overlooked the continuity of the literary tradition. According to Müller, it was important not to lose sight of the greatest poet, Mankind, or of the greatest poem, History.²

During the course of the century, this elevated Romantic ideal of mankind gradually fused with a partly positivist, often almost religious belief in progress, as proclaimed by Victor Hugo in *La légende des siècles*. In this monumental prophetic ode to human civilization, the future was addressed as it had been in Condorcet's *Esquisse*. The end of the poem predicts a twentieth century full of goodness, truth, and beauty:

*Where is this ship sailing? It is sailing, in day garment,
To the divine and pure future, to virtue,
To the science that one sees glitter,
To the end of plagues, to generous oblivion,
To abundance, tranquility, laughter, and the happy human being;
It is sailing, this glorious ship,
To justice, reason, and brotherhood,
To the sacred and holy truth
Without deception and veils,
To love, to hearts bound firmly by soft ties,
To the righteous, the great, the good, the beautiful ... – As you can see,
it is, indeed, sailing to the stars!³*

Around 1800, in both English and German Romanticism the experience of time was still largely cyclical or finalistic rather than linear. But there was one event that robbed this experience of all its former assumptions: the French Revolution, which had an overwhelming effect on almost every prominent Romanticist. The sense of history was challenged by both the ideological radicalism and the mass character of events in France; things happened there that changed the world forever. History manifested itself in an irreversible form, with, suddenly, a highly uncertain future.

The word 'revolution' acquired a new meaning at this time, becoming an historically charged concept of change (in the Koselleckian sense), an ideological term. Henceforth, the concept of revolution encompassed an explosive paradox: it accentuated, in this new context, both an absolute (and violent) break with tradition and the realization of ideals that were, in fact, a continuation of what had been considered valuable before that break.

M.H. Abrams outlines six fundamental characteristics of this idea of revolution that arose during Romanticism and has been so influential ever since:

(1) the revolution will, by an inescapable and cleansing explosion of violence and destruction, reconstitute the existing political, social, and moral order absolutely and from its very foundations, and so (2) bring about abruptly, or in a remarkably short time, the shift from the present era of profound evil, suffering, and disorder to an era of peace, justice, and optimal conditions for general happiness; (3) it will be led by a militant elite, who will find ranged against them the forces dedicated to preserving the present evils [...] ; (4) though it will originate in a particular and critical time and place, it will by irresistible contagion spread everywhere, to include all mankind; (5) its benefits will endure for a very long time, perhaps forever, because the transformation of the institutional circumstances and the cultural ambience of man will heal the intellectual and spiritual malaise [...]; (6) it is inevitable, because it is guaranteed either by a transcendent or by an immanent something, not ourselves, which makes for the ineluctable triumph of total justice, community, and happiness on earth.⁴

Revolutionary thought in this form only became common in innovative movements in the arts at the end of the nineteenth century, eventually breaking through in full force with the avant-garde, as will be discussed later. The idea of a 'break' implied in the first three of these characteristics was at odds with ideas of progress, which implied a certain degree of continuity.

Possibly because of this erosion of continuity in history and the denial or absence of an open future, but surely also because of the reaction to the chaos and confusion that revolutionary thought provoked on all sides, the notion of progress seems to have temporarily gone underground during the Romantic era and, to use a Romantic metaphor, to have ripened for a while in the dark. By the time it reappeared, it had revolution in its blood together with exalted ideals of mankind. And, perhaps even more important for the arts, under the influence of Romanticism, the belief in the power of the imagination, originality, and fantasy became so great that unlimited change and renewal were henceforth taken for granted and began to break open the future. The Romantic adage of the 'principally incompletable' – the complement of this tribute to the imagination – brought that future into full view: from now on, mankind and thus the artist would look out onto a shifting horizon.

The nineteenth century: Comte and Spencer

Ideas about progress were expressed in countless ways during the nineteenth century, also in the arts. Rather than trying to describe them comprehensively,

I will give a brief overview of the main ideas according to the type of argumentation.

Three main streams can be discerned in the multiformity of the nineteenth century.⁵ First, there is the complex group of theories of progress that were grafted onto German idealism and (mostly German as well) Romanticism. As stated earlier, most of these theories adhered more or less explicitly to a certain ideal of perfection. This was visible in Hegel and somewhat earlier in Herder's metaphor of 'flourishing,' which greatly influenced historical descriptions of culture that talked in terms of organic development. Many thinkers and writers projected onto history an *a priori* plan with set goals, then gauged these goals against an earlier period (preferably antiquity or the Middle Ages). Unlike the next two streams, this group, owing to its finalistic and cyclical conception of time, did not belong to the realm of ideas of progress in the narrower sense.

The second stream consisted of a group of theories in line with those ideas expressed by Condorcet in his *Esquisse*, where historical thought presupposed a linear conception of time and figured in a 'sociological' perspective, in the context of a broad, if not all-encompassing, social theory. It is found in philosophers like Saint-Simon, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill, August Comte, and Hippolyte Taine. In this mostly positivist approach, progress in the arts was seen as either a necessary side-effect of systematically developing social processes or as a product of socio-economic change; or, as the father of Virginia Woolf, philosopher and essayist Leslie Stephen, put it, in 1876, with respect to literature: 'Literature is the noise of the wheels of history.'⁶

In the third stream, which was increasingly important during the second half of the nineteenth century, ideas of progress were dominated by evolutionist thought, which was also based on a linear conception of time. The evolutionary model yielded a comprehensive framework for the description of cultural processes for Herbert Spencer and for the initially less influential Edward B. Tylor and Lewis H. Morgan. The history and development of the arts were reduced to an originally biological model of evolution that sought to explain the gradual emergence of new species and the attainment of a progressively higher level. Here, progress in the arts was not seen as a side-effect of social processes, but rather as part of a more general, absolute law to which social processes also adhered.

Auguste Comte's philosophy is a good illustration of the second stream. As explained earlier, Comte identified three different stages in the totality of social processes. According to him, the arts already originate in the primitive beginnings of the first, *theological* stage, namely in so-called fetishism or, as it is also called, animism: after all, the belief that everything is imbued with a spirit relies heavily on the power of the imagination. The further refinement of this theological stage, polytheism, also contributes to the emergence of the

arts, if for no other reason than that the numerous gods must be lavishly 'dressed' and creatively worshipped. In the last period of this stage, monotheism, there is what can be called a temporary peak. Comte illustrates this point with examples from Shakespeare, Corneille, and Molière, with the prevailing ideal of harmony, the discovery of new musical instruments, Raphaël's paintings, and so on.

In the second or *metaphysical* stage, the personified supernatural forces are gradually replaced by abstract philosophical concepts. This era of theoretical abstractions was, in Comte's eyes, unproductive for the further development of the arts. He believed it was more appropriately understood as stagnation than regression.

A further advancement only recurs in the final, *positive* stage. Here, the arts are assigned a role similar to the one they had in the theological stage, namely, to further the development of Comte's religiously tinted Utopia, his Religion of Humanity. Positivist art should hasten the realization of the Utopia he was propagating, and to that end, forms and styles should be further developed – from imitation, to idealization and expression.⁷

Although Comte's quasi-religious ideals for the future never caught on, his concept of progress in art is significant: the idea that the arts develop inevitably, as part of a social process, and that art has a propagandistic, committed function, was to have a significant influence on later thought on progress in art, particularly on Marxist theory and the philosophy of the avant-garde.

The belief that progress in the arts was demonstrable and that it was part of an all-encompassing process also manifested itself in England, albeit in a different form. Ideas of progress were commonplace there in the first half of the nineteenth century, at least in intellectual circles, although initially there, too, the eighteenth-century skepticism toward the arts prevailed. Writer and poet Thomas Love Peacock attributed this to the irrational qualities he ascribed to art. In *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820), he proclaimed that, all in all, poetry was an atavistic, even childlike, phenomenon:

*Poetry [originally] was the mental rattle that awakened the attention of intellect in the infancy of civil society: but for the maturity of mind to make a serious business of the playthings of its childhood, is as absurd as for a full-grown man [...] to be charmed to sleep by the jingle of silver bells.*⁸

An ambivalent sound was heard throughout the nineteenth century, reverberating like a basso continuo through the din of the music of progress. Whereas the arts were distinct because they drew on the qualities of the irrational, the untamed, and the imaginary, phenomena so highly esteemed in Romanticism, at the same time the skepticism inherited from the Enlightenment

toward such things increased. In this respect, Macaulay's view is revealing. While he did not deny all progress in art, he did believe progress in poetry was inversely related to progress in culture in general. The more knowledge increases, the less poetry has to offer and so it starts to decay, he wrote in 1825.⁹

Herbert Spencer, on the other hand, integrated progress in the arts effortlessly into his description of an all-embracing process of development, by describing the arts in terms of a *model of evolution*. Although a contemporary of Darwin, he seems to have been more influenced by Lamarck, Malthus, and K.E. von Baer. He also went beyond evolution in the biological sense, linking his ideas on development to social theories, and ultimately conceiving an integrated 'synthetic philosophy,' a universal system in which biological, psychological, sociological, and ethical observations were described in an evolutionary light. He saw evolution as the integration of matter, and the spreading of movement that was related to that process, where matter changes from an indistinct, incoherent homogeneity into a distinct, coherent heterogeneity. Evolution was a cosmic, gradual, cumulative process that, normatively speaking, was desirable and could therefore be called progress. These highly abstract ideas can be illustrated by looking at Spencer's views on progress in the arts.¹⁰

Spencer describes how the different arts gradually develop, in an evolutionary process, from several indistinct primitive manifestations of culture into increasingly complex phenomena. During the course of history, music and poetry emerge from dance, painting and sculpture from 'architecture,' because embellishments slowly become distinct forms in their own right. Later, a further differentiation between painting and sculpture is seen in the renouncing of the use of color by sculpture. Spencer also describes an increasing heterogeneity in the transition from religious to secular art, in the continual emergence of new genres in the visual arts, and in the increasingly complex structure of the artworks themselves.

An Egyptian mural, for example, has no depth perception. The figures are depicted on a flat surface, without plays of light and shade, and with only a limited number of colors; clothing, pose, and facial expressions are stereotyped. Compared with later Western painting, such art is largely homogeneous, but at the same time incoherent: an Egyptian mural consists of several separate pictures without mutual coherence, like medieval tapestries. In modern painting, there is immense diversity in color, pose, expression, and use of light, and, consequently, the organization prerequisite to a harmony between such disparate elements, must also be great; in other words, the heterogeneity is coherent.¹¹

Spencer saw the arts not only as developing in the direction of a coherent heterogeneity, but also as becoming more 'definite': renderings in the visual

arts were slowly becoming more realistic (an idea that was, however, no longer undisputed in Spencer's time), individual characters in literature were being described more 'naturally' and with more psychological nuances, and so on.

Nineteenth-century cultural science: from cave paintings to Rembrandt

During the course of the nineteenth century, the emergence of what – following the distinction made by the neo-Kantian Rickert in his *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft* (1899) – has come to be called the 'cultural sciences' was clearly visible in numerous European countries. This scientific interest in culture was largely historically oriented: whether in relation to language, anthropology, or a study of the arts, questions were constantly asked about the origins, emergence, development, and progression of cultural phenomena. Characteristic of all this historical research was the presupposition on the part of the art historians of either one or more of the three historical perspectives outlined above.

Even today, standard historical surveys of, especially, music and the visual arts invariably begin with primitive, half-civilized tribes who once noticed that the string of their bows not only shot arrows but also produced sounds, and who tried to predispose the gods in favor of the hunt by painting rock faces. The Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and early Christian civilizations are then described, followed by a series of style periods – from the Middle Ages, through the Renaissance and (later) Baroque, to Classicism and Romanticism. (Literary histories generally began – as they still do today – with the start of a unique, national literature in the Middle Ages.)

Such historical surveys are often based on ideas of evolution and progress, which group successive civilizations and periods in a meaningful but also obligatory linear order implying an advancing civilization. These ideas form the starting point of E.B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871):

*... that the savage state in some measure represents an early condition of mankind, out of which the higher culture has gradually developed or evolved, by processes still in regular operation as of old, the result showing that, on the whole, progress has far prevailed over relapse.*¹²

This modeling of the past in terms of progress and development flourished in various fields. In France, Ferdinand Brunetière attempted to describe literary history on the basis of Darwin's model of evolution, so as to explain, among

other things, the development of genres. Similarly, English literary historians John Addington Symonds and Richard Green Moulton described the history of Elizabethan theater on the basis of Darwinian-inspired evolutionism, while H.M. Posnett based his approach to literary history on Spencer's principles of evolution.¹³ Positivist notions of progress provided a framework for German linguist and literary critic W. Scherer (*Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 1883), although he, too, believed there were indications of a cyclical pattern of six-hundred years in the history of literature. Scherer's approach to development in language and literature had a strongly deterministic slant, as characterized in his three-part formula 'Eerbtes, Erlerntes, Erlebtes' ('inherited, learned, experienced'). He was referring here to the conditioning factors of development – national heritage and family background, literary tradition, and life circumstances.

Scherer's combining of perspectives on progress with determinism resembles the approach of French critic Hippolyte Taine, who, strongly influenced by Hegel but without his far-reaching finalism, saw the history of the arts as part of a coherent development of culture in general, in line with Comtean positivism. Taine believed a work of art was the result of 'race, milieu, and moment,' that is, of the inherited disposition of a people, of tradition and social circumstance, and of the moment in a specific period of the historical process during which the work of art was created. But this inevitable progress was thoroughly relativized by Taine through his bleak view of humanity, which acknowledged scientific progress but reflected a persistent skepticism toward morality and the arts.¹⁴

Music history tends to reveal a similar approach, in some cases even up to the present. Building on the work of German music historians like H. Riemann and, a few years later, G. Adler, a steady flow of historical surveys from an evolutionary perspective, or based on ideas of progress, was published whose ideas were, at most, relativized with respect to contemporary work, which was greeted reluctantly anyway. Art history only arose as a scientific discipline during the second half of the nineteenth century, when notions of art philosophy, traditional art criticism, growing empirical research, and progressivist positivism converged. Carl Schnaase and Franz Kugler's surveys are important in this context. Kugler's influential *Handbuch der Kunstgeschichte* (1842) strives to do no less than catalogue all the works of art of all people throughout all of history.¹⁵

Around 1900, several methodological discussions and controversies arose in the historiography of the different arts. Yet, despite their great diversity, many of them can still be reduced to the problematization of periodization and evolutionist ideas, which had gradually come to structure the view of the past. But also in a broader sense, there was increasing resistance to all forms of historical periodic thinking. On the one hand, this had already been the case for

some time in the tradition of historicism (a striking illustration is the work of Jacob Burckhardt). On the other hand, there was growing resistance toward the 'excrescences of the historical mind that burdened the present,' as Nietzsche had already called it in his second *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtung* (1874; *Thoughts Out of Season*, vol. 2: *Use and Abuse of History*). It was time, Nietzsche wrote,

*to march, accompanied by the whole army of satirical malice, against the excrescences of the historical mind, against the disproportionate reveling in the process at the expense of existence and life, and against the impetuous shifting of all perspectives.*¹⁶

Although, in most cases, without the satirical maliciousness advocated by Nietzsche, the revolt against nineteenth-century historical thought on culture undeniably erupted, for example, in Dilthey's hermeneutic approach or, a few years later, in Bergson's philosophy and Croce's influential aesthetics. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, ideas about evolution and progress in the arts, at least in the cultural sciences, had receded into the background, paralleling, as it turns out, the more extensive relativization of ideas of progress in the early twentieth century.¹⁷

This reflection on a theoretical ordering of the history of the arts often led to historical interpretations in which problems of periodization were replaced by rather speculative (but by no means always useless) theories on style analysis, as in Wölfflin (*Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 1915), or on concepts (related to that of *Zeitgeist*), as in Austrian art historian Alois Riegl. Riegl tried to understand works of art from the past primarily through the perspective of their own time, as expressions of the then-prevailing '*Kunstwollen*' (spirit of art; literally, 'will to art'). In his *Spättrömische Kunstindustrie* (1901; *Late-Roman Art Industry*), he thus tried to show that there was no reason to view the period of early Christian art as a period of decline if one made allowances for the other norms of which this art was an expression.

But the way thought on progress in the arts took shape in the cultural sciences is only part of the story. Equally important is the question of how artists and their public responded to a historical situating of the arts. After all, with the growing independence of the aesthetic domain during and after Romanticism, it was the artists themselves, followed by the critics and the public, who in the first place determined what art and its relevant history was, and to what extent one could speak of progress or development in that history. In light of the newly founded autonomy of the artistic domain, the cultural sciences became more a reflection on and thinking through of that domain than a fundamental statement on the degree of progress in the arts.

Moreover, commentary and reflection were now also beginning to play a greater role in the arts themselves. Toward the end of the nineteenth century,

a growing number of artistic *movements* had started to manifest themselves, by propagating ideals through a discourse on ideas of progress, a discourse permeated by the recurring, topical concept of revolution. Since the turn of the century, commentary and reflection on the identity of art *in the artworks themselves* had quickly intensified. Dadaism was the first radical manifestation of this phenomenon. From that time on, the conceptual component of the various branches of twentieth-century art could no longer be dismissed: since then, much art has derived its meaning and value from a complex discourse – of commentary and (often highly eclectic and associative) theorization. Regardless of what one might have to say about this, it is clear that from then on, the commentary of artists and art critics began to receive the attention it deserved. A shift in focus to modernism and the avant-garde is now therefore relevant.

Modernism and the avant-garde

Much has been written in recent decades about the meaning and origins of the concept of modern (modernism, modernity, and so on), especially since the emergence of postmodernism. As stated earlier, it is striking that these historical concepts first appeared in an aesthetic context. This would seem to suggest that concepts of progress and change in the arts are related, at least in some way, to the broader concept of modernization.¹⁸

The recent history of the meaning of the concept of ‘modern’ is rather complex. It becomes slightly more transparent, however, when a distinction is made between ‘modern’ and ‘old,’ or ‘former,’ on the one hand, and ‘modern’ and what endures, or is ‘eternal,’ on the other.¹⁹ This second meaning, linked to our word ‘fashion,’ became increasingly prominent during the nineteenth century and reflects an increasingly prevalent historical experience of time, as described in the first chapter through Koselleck. The new experience of time made it possible for the term not only to refer to a single period, like Romanticism, but also to acquire a new meaning through reference to a different time.

Baudelaire’s study of the painter Constantin Guys, *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (The Painter of Modern Life), was published in 1859. In it, Baudelaire posits that Beauty manifests itself in the ever-changing ideal of the present, while at the same time ‘eternal Beauty’ also appears in the transitory and the contingent (comparable to Perrault’s *beau relatif*). Beauty, according to Baudelaire, is by nature ambivalent, precisely because it embodies both the transitory and the eternal: ‘Modernity is the transitory, the fleeting, the contingent half of art, while the other half is eternal and immutable.’²⁰ From the moment Baudelaire first emphasized aspects of the transitory and the contingent in

the modern, the concept slowly came to embrace an increasing number of historical categories of change. The emergence of 'the modern' thus kept pace with the growing use of '-isms' – the characterization of 'movements' such as Socialism, Liberalism, Modernism, and, in art, Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism, and so on.

Baudelaire was also a key figure in another respect when, following in the Romantic tradition, he insisted on the importance of the imagination. In this view, the *imagination* of the creative artist, that restless activity of genius, breaks free from the banal copying of reality according to set rules. This appreciation of the power of the imagination, which first emerged during the eighteenth century, confronts the transitory with the eternal, thus becoming the motor of the modern.²¹

The word 'modern' acquired an increasingly normative connotation during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, and thus a growing pragmatic implication, which interfered with every prevailing notion of progress. The word was used extensively by social and artistic groups: 'We must be absolutely modern,' pleaded Rimbaud.²² The word reappeared continually in titles of journals and reflections on current developments in society and art. In the German *Brockhaus Enzyklopedie* (1902), the noun 'the modern' is described as 'the name for the epitomization of the latest social, literary, and artistic trends.'²³ (The word 'trend' – in German *Richtung* – is highly revealing in this respect, as are the increasingly frequently used terms 'movement' and 'current.')

Around 1900, however, the term 'avant-garde' – in many respects closely allied to 'modernism,' and often associated by many with it, especially in the Anglo-Saxon tradition – appeared regularly in aesthetic discussions. The term itself stems from French military vocabulary dating from the end of the eighteenth century, and had already been used metaphorically during the French Revolution to describe progressive social tendencies. As far as we know, Saint-Simon applied 'avant-garde' to the arts for the first time in 1825, assigning artists a place in the forefront of social processes of change. A few years later, Sainte-Beuve described Stendhal's resistance to Classicism as the 'light cavalry of the avant-garde' (*cheveau-léger d'avant-garde*), after which the label 'the artists of the avant-garde' gradually became current in journalism, first with reference to literature and later with reference to the other arts.²⁴ In the early years of the twentieth century, the concepts of the 'avant-garde' and 'modernism' acquired an additional, more social, connotation, as reflected, for example, in Lenin's famous remark from 1902, in which he calls the Communist Party the 'avant-garde of the working class.' Over time, however, the concept retained a primarily aesthetic sense in most countries.

Yet there was something paradoxical about the accentuation of aesthetic content in the concept of the avant-garde, given that its most prominent char-

acteristic was its resistance to the institution of art as a whole. The historical avant-garde rejected art, as a merely aesthetic phenomenon that had conquered an autonomous domain within societal relationships: in this perspective, art had become a kind of sanctuary that had nothing more to do with society or life itself. In this sense, art had ended. The fact that during the twentieth century the avant-garde nonetheless became the most important institutional art movement and the most prominent ideology within the still-upheld domain of art is thus also proof of its weakness: the social success of the avant-garde is also its greatest failure.

This paradox is central to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1984), a rightfully influential treatise on that movement. According to Bürger, in the avant-garde, art becomes aware of its own principles, and, as a result, self-criticism and reflective commentary on the social subsystem of art can develop. This self-criticism, however, is more radical and far-reaching than system-immanent critiques. Dadaism thus attacked the *institution* of art rather than a particular style or movement; in fact, Dadaism no longer wanted to be counted as art at all. 'Art,' wrote Picabia militantly, in his Dada manifesto of 1920, 'is a pharmaceutical product for imbeciles.'²⁵

A less extreme trend within the avant-garde attempted to draw art back into the '*Lebenspraxis*' (practice of life), striving only to destroy its autonomous nature, its aestheticism, not art itself. It advocated that the artist should no longer hide behind the principle of 'art for art's sake,' but should return to society and normal life. In retrospect, the avant-garde critique of the *institution* of art can thus clearly be considered part of the aesthetic domain itself: in this light, the avant-garde can be interpreted as a reaction to the aestheticism of, among other things, Symbolism and decadence. As an artistic movement, it thus offered commentary on an influential movement that could now be seen as belonging to an outdated tradition. This kind of avant-garde criticism attacked the 'ivory-tower' character that the arts had acquired by the end of the nineteenth century, and that Edmund Wilson would later attack, where literature was concerned, in *Axel's Castle*. This criticism, however, neither succeeded in nor usually aimed at abolishing art as a whole. It thus paved the way for the neo-avant-garde and the previously mentioned paradox.²⁶

The avant-garde protested against the status art had attained as an institution separate from the 'practice of life.' Bürger's dialectical interpretation sought to transform art in the Hegelian sense, which was to abolish it and bring it onto a higher level (*aufheben*). In doing so, it forgot that art is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a much broader socio-historical process. According to Bürger, the *Aufhebung* of art sought by the avant-garde was 'false' because that ideal cannot be achieved in a 'bourgeois society,' despite its 'pathos of historical progressiveness.'²⁷

The moment the radical variant of the theoretical avant-garde is taken into

account, it becomes virtually impossible to identify progress in the arts, because in this variant, as in Hegel, progress in art leads to its demise. In the extreme language of the Dadaist pamphlets (which we must interpret with caution because they are not intended as essayistic prose, and because they constantly ridicule science, logic, and rationality), past and present are continually renounced. In his *Dada Manifesto* of 1918, Tristan Tzara wrote: 'DADA: dismissal of memory; DADA: dismissal of archaeology; DADA: dismissal of prophets; DADA: dismissal of future.' He also put up a good fight where the concept of progress was concerned:

If I cry out:

IDEAL, IDEAL, IDEAL

KNOWLEDGE, KNOWLEDGE, KNOWLEDGE

BOOMBOOM, BOOMBOOM, BOOMBOOM,

*I have a pretty faithful version of progress, law, morality, and all other fine qualities that various highly intelligent men have discussed in so many books [...]*²⁸

The radical avant-garde both denied and mocked ideas of progress in art, because art itself was meant to be superseded. This is a clear reflection of what started to become visible in the previous chapter, namely, that the arts were beginning to derive their identity precisely from the discussion of progress in culture.

The radical avant-garde further ridiculed ideas of progress because it saw its own position not as a result of developments in the past, but as a *break* with that past – and thus a denial of it. In this polemical variant of the avant-garde, *difference* was continually sought; in the words of Octavio Paz, the artist connects the 'aesthetics of surprise' with the 'aesthetics of negation.'²⁹ This gives the revolutionary pathos of Romanticism, which dictated a radical break with tradition, a new and – for the development of the arts during the twentieth century – far-reaching impulse.

The less extreme ranks of the avant-garde, however, did interpret events and artworks – albeit with all manner of nuance and variation – in the context of one or another perspective of progress. They, too, posited a break with the past. But they did not see that break as absolute, because with the intended elimination of the autonomous status of the arts, artistic developments had once again become part of a social process. This process was frequently interpreted by the avant-garde in terms of progress or, at least, as a (sometimes vague) Utopian desire. No matter how much the Italian Futurists, for example, resisted the past (along with the present and much more), their movement still had an undeniably Utopian character: they bombarded history with what Nietzsche called 'satirical malignancies' (*satirische Bosheiten*), such as their plea for the destruction of all museums. But their admiration for tech-

nology and 'the machine,' and their attempt to achieve a radical aestheticization of society – in short, their 'modernolatry' – belied a view of history or, perhaps, of time, that was present in notions of progress. This was even more evident in the Russian Futurists, who overlapped with social-revolutionary currents in their all-pervasive focus on both new art and a new society. Insofar as they rejected the autonomous position of art, the Surrealists and, to a lesser degree, the Constructivists, also advocated social engagement, in which art sometimes had a propagandistic value but where it was viewed primarily as an integral part of the Utopia being sought.

Yet no matter how much the innovations in avant-garde art were presented and defended in terms of progress, it remained exceedingly difficult for the defenders of that art to substantiate their claim, as the following chapters will reveal. In the first place, art was no longer an autonomous institution in the eyes of the avant-garde, whereby it lost its identity; in that case, developments could only be seen in a broader perspective and no longer as an advance in or of art. Given the paradoxical development of the avant-garde into a highly successful, autonomous art movement, however, this objection was unimportant or, at least, not fatal. It was a different matter, however, where the idea of a break with the past was concerned. As Bürger writes,

Whether the break with tradition that the historical avant-garde movements brought about has not made irrelevant all talk about the historical level of artistic techniques practiced today is something to be carefully thought about.³⁰

According to Bürger, since the avant-garde, the arts have had access to a wide variety of procedures and stylistic forms from past eras. He cites the presence of the technique of the Old Masters in some of Magritte's paintings as an example, but there is also the Romantic interest in the dream found in Surrealism, and the primitivism visible in a Cubist painter like Picasso, that is, if one considers these artists as part of the avant-garde. Through the ideology of the 'break,' the desire for both provocation and the 'new,' and the experimental attempts to continually transgress boundaries, the historical order of procedures and styles was transformed into a 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous.' The consequence of this, Bürger says, is that 'no movement in the arts today can legitimately claim to be historically more advanced *as art* than any other.'³¹

The problematic relationship between 'discontinuity' and the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous' on the one hand and between ideas on progress in art on the other applies *a fortiori* to the development of the various arts following the historical avant-garde, from the postwar neo-avant-garde up to present-day postmodernism.

In addition, there is the complication, mentioned earlier, that after mod-

ernism and the historical avant-garde, the various arts incorporated ever more rapidly a discourse of art criticism into the artworks themselves. More and more art, whether music, literature, film, or visual art, owed its existence to the fact that it commented on other artworks, artists, traditions, or even the social circumstances of art. Although an implicit belief in renewal and progress scarcely seems to have been relinquished, a continual, ambiguous, but nonetheless radical, critique of tradition was proposed in this development, whereby the possibility of a conception of history with an identifiable pattern of progress was virtually reduced to nil. To the extent that modern art came to be identified with this increasingly important conceptual component, ideas of progress became largely obsolete. In this sense, Duchamp's famous bicycle wheel on a stool was not just a beginning of the 'modern' visual arts but also an end. Art had dissolved into a discourse that seemed to render absurd any assessment in terms of progress. This brings us back to the discussion touched on in the introduction, in which Danto, for similar reasons, announced the end of the visual arts.

No matter how frequently ideas of progress are still assumed in the practice of the arts and the discourse in which they function, they always seem to lead to an aporia, a perplexing problem. Both finalism and the revolutionary thought of Romanticism continued to erode the assumption of linear time, and hence, of continuity. The positivist tradition of the nineteenth century diminished the specific identity of the arts by seeing them as part of an all-encompassing process, thus reducing them to an ornament of social development. The same effect was achieved in an evolutionary approach like Spencer's, and in the way the historical-cultural sciences tried to lace the arts into a corset of a much too simplistic model. And, one of the biggest problems seems to have been the increasingly reflective quality beginning to manifest itself in the artworks themselves.

For my purposes, though, it is still too early to answer the question of whether it is useless to talk of progress in the arts. That answer must wait until later in the book. Following the historical survey of the last two chapters, I will now turn to the more systematic question of how ideas of progress in, or in relation to, the arts were used, and why they were so appealing. To this end, it seems relevant to take a closer look at the context in which they emerged.

4 On Making Revolution

'The little Modernsky'

On 28 May 1913, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* premiered in the new Théâtre des Champs Elysées in Paris, performed by Diaghilev's famous Ballets Russes, with Nijinsky in the lead role. Stravinsky later recalled the first performance of this much talked-about composition:

The piece had hardly begun when a jeer broke out, and I cannot judge the performance because I left the concert hall after the first few measures of the Prelude. I was furious. These manifestations, which initially occurred only now and again, were now common. Counter reactions arose, and a terrible commotion ensued. During the entire performance, I stayed with Nijinsky. He stood on a chair, screaming with all his might at the dancers: 'sixteen, seventeen, eighteen ...,' because they obviously had their own way of keeping time. Yet the poor dancers didn't hear a word he said owing to the tumult in the hall and their own pounding feet. I had to grab Nijinsky by his clothes, because he was beyond himself and could jump off the stage at any moment and cause a scandal. Diaghilev for his part ordered the electricians to turn the lights on and off in the hall in an attempt to calm the tumult.¹

In the ensuing months, the proponents and the skeptical critics of this highly controversial work quickly agreed on one thing: the daring dissonance, the previously unheard-of shifts in rhythm, and the explosive contrasts in the *Rite of Spring* had changed music history forever. It seemed as if Stravinsky would become one of the most important innovators of twentieth-century music.

From the First World War on, however, Stravinsky moved in a direction of what came to be known as neo-classicism, where he gradually returned to old composers, from J.S. Bach to Rossini, and increasingly drew on the classical harmony of the previous two centuries. From then on, the musical assault on traditional tonality would be pursued by others, primarily Schönberg.

Stravinsky protested against the neo-classical label imposed on him. But, despite all his attempts in later publications to emphasize and clarify the consistent development of his work, the leading critics labeled him as reactionary or, at best, dismissed him as 'old-fashioned,' the way Dutch composer Willem Pijper had described him in his survey of the history of modern music. Pijper believed all there was to say about Stravinsky was that 'the compositions that

appeared after 1924 had less and less to do with the development of all European music since Wagner.’²

It is a frequently voiced criticism. Schönberg had already ridiculed Stravinsky as reactionary and as superficially returning to the past, in the second of his *Three Satires*, Op. 28, the text of which reads:

*Who's drumming there?
It must be the little Modernsky!
He's had a wig-tail tailor-made;
Isn't it beautiful!
Just like real false hair!
Just like a wig!
Exactly (just like the little Modernsky imagines himself),
exactly like Papa Bach!*

The music of this satire further contains ironic references to ‘traditional’ material (its ending sung in unison in the key of C, its allusions to classical counterpoint, and so on).³ Such criticism persisted throughout Stravinsky’s life; decades later, he was still confronted with accusations of restoration and conservatism.

In his *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (1948; *Philosophy of Modern Music*), Adorno thus expounds on Schönberg’s merits and Stravinsky’s sins. His book is divided into two parts: ‘Schönberg and Progress’ and ‘Stravinsky and Restoration.’ Although Adorno can hardly be accused of subscribing to a naïve nineteenth-century faith in progress, his approach is highly revealing, as is the motto borrowed from Hegel that precedes his essay on Stravinsky:

*In no way does it help to reappropriate, substantially so to speak, world views from the past, i.e. to want to adhere to one of those life philosophies, for example by becoming Catholic, as many have recently done with respect to art in order to find peace of mind.*⁴

Adorno’s criticism focuses not only on the mythological content of *Rite of Spring*, but also on the fact that Stravinsky did not pioneer twelve-tone music, which, despite Adorno’s complex dialectic line of reasoning, appears in his view to be the unequivocal path to progress. Nowhere, Adorno complains, does *Rite* become atonal or free itself from the shackles of tonality: ‘Stravinskian regression [...] replaces [...] progress [*Fortgang*] with repetition.’ This is the same kind of criticism that American postwar art critic Clement Greenberg leveled at Picasso, who, unlike Greenberg’s heroes, was unwilling to draw the inevitable conclusion resulting from the development of his work, namely that of total abstraction.⁵

The present as the past of the future

Radical innovations in art, such as the *Rite of Spring*, are found readily in past centuries, as is parrying with notions of progress in order to support or reject change. Why is this, one might ask? Who does it? And how?

Such concepts have, indeed, become more implicit during recent decades, and few art critics and theorists still openly defend the idea of progress in art. But the sometimes vehement denial of such progress often suggests a struggle with the hydra of Progress mentioned earlier in the introduction. Moreover, many of these statements form part of a discourse that abounds in theory, commentary, and an abundance of complex static. Perhaps it is more than just static, however, because with the increasing autonomy of art works and their increasing conceptual content, reflection on art has steadily become part of the artworks themselves. Artworks comment on other artworks, as we have already seen with Schönberg's *Satires*, but also on themselves and their own coming into being (and sometimes even abolition), on critiques, on the public, and on the perception and processing of what they are.

The identity of artworks is primarily determined by tradition, context, and history, and the artworks, the artists, and the public are totally aware of this. It is this awareness, whether intuitive or explicitly argued, that makes the static so complex. To what extent is something mere reflection on an artwork and to what extent is it part of the artwork itself? Duchamp's bicycle wheel on a stool is a good illustration of this problem, along with Magritte's rendering of a pipe with the caption 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe,' a work often loved by philosophers for precisely this reason. Commentary and reflection on artworks are inextricably linked with the artworks themselves. This is no less valid for the historic consciousness with which art is experienced; art is always situated in time.

Meanwhile, the three questions have already been raised of why art is so often thought and talked of in terms of progress, who does this, and how. Let us consider first what happens when someone interprets a recent artistic achievement in terms of progress. On first glance, that person seems to stare into an ordered past, to see what has been created and to place the new achievement within the context of a historically advancing process.

But notions of progress imply more than this, as chapter one has already revealed. They are also *future-oriented*. Whoever judges events or achievements in these terms actually does something remarkable: he reverses his binoculars in order to observe from a distance what is close by, thus describing the present as the past of the future. If Schönberg, for example, views his twelve-tone music as progress in music, this implies he believes music should and will be composed like that from then on. In other words, he believes that, several years later, posterity will conclude that he took a step that changed the course of music. Thus, not only historians (later) decide that history has

moved in a particular direction; as soon as notions of progress are used, people too start to 'make' (or consolidate) history, like future historians of their own time.

From the perspective of the production of art, there is an obvious reason for speaking of innovation and progress. No matter how strict the rules or how limited the room for creative maneuver, the artist is expected to innovate and not to endlessly repeat, both within the limits of the artwork itself and, equally obviously, beyond it, in his oeuvre. (Even repetitive music and minimal art involve variation.) Apart from the problem of reproducibility (etchings, music, and theater performances, etc.), every artwork is unique, that is, never an exact copy of something else. Moreover, since Romanticism, but even commencing in the eighteenth century, when the creative content of art was already becoming important, every artwork and every artist claim originality. In that sense, art will always change, and every artist – compelled by the psychology of the creative process, in which an awareness of regression and diminishing creative possibilities has a crippling effect (Stravinsky had every reason to reject the reproach of regression) – will interpret changes in his oeuvre as continuous progress.

Such individually and psychologically interpreted progress is, however, less relevant if the notion of progress is seen in a broader perspective. Naturally, notions of individual progress play a part in this, but even more important is the perspective on a particular group of artists, on the state of a discipline, and on the general direction in which history or another branch of art is moving. In other words, progress in this sense is more a philosophical, cultural-historical, and sociological category than a psychological or artistic one. It is not the coming into being of an individual artwork or oeuvre that is at stake here, but the consciousness of achieving, through artworks, irreversible changes in the past of an artistic system's future.

To further refine this perspective, it is useful to make a distinction between the small changes that occur within the confines of more or less fixed rules and the changes that transgress those rules or norms and thus bring about widespread innovation. This distinction is common today in historiographies of the various arts. René Wellek and Austin Warren's *Theory of Literature*, important to more arts than just literature, has had a major influence on this approach. In this book, the authors study the historical development of literature on the basis of the norms and values intrinsic to the artworks themselves. They view the history of literature as an evolution of such norms and values, in which the concept of 'period' is one of the most important tools. A period is a time span governed by a system of norms, standards, and conventions of which the introduction, dissemination, variety, integration, and loss can (and must) be identified. A period is thus characterized as 'a time section defined by a system of norms embedded in the historical process,' while the histori-

ography of periods within an art form consists of tracing the changes from one normative system to another.⁶

This perspective on literary history – formulated by Wellek and Warren as a succession of *systems of norms*, of cohesive conventions – remains relevant today, although the importance of this particular historiography may itself have declined during the last two decades. But while the terminology may have changed, people still tend to base their views on the scheme derived from Tinianov's Formalism and Prague Structuralism, where developments are described in terms of cohesive and internal norms and rules. Something similar applies *mutatis mutandis* to the historiography of the other arts. It no longer only attempts to present a portrait gallery in chronological order, but also introduces a content-based cohesion by constructing periods influenced by certain norms, and by applying demarcations that show how and when these norms change.

The structure of artistic revolutions

This approach runs parallel to developments in the historiography of the sciences during the past few decades. The most important work in this context is that of Thomas Kuhn.⁷ Kuhn is highly aware of the social and pragmatic aspects of the development of science and of the implicit norms that govern and limit scientific activity. His theory differs, however, from the art history notions mentioned above in that, in his view, these norms are seldom if ever explicit or conscious; rather, scientists operate on the basis of *exemplars*, examples that serve as standards for what is or is not valid, and that form an essential component of scientific training.

Kuhn continually distinguishes between two kinds of periods in the history of the sciences. The first is that of 'normal science,' in which a number of practices are fixed and where there is agreement on the dominant theories, problems to be solved, and (often metaphysical) starting points – in short, on how the world looks from a scientific, epistemological perspective. This view of reality, this totality of assumptions, rules, and methods associated with a specific scientific community, Kuhn calls a 'paradigm.'

At a given point, all the conundrums within such a paradigm are solved: either they turn out to be unsolvable or wrongly formulated, or, owing to external factors, a feeling of crisis and discomfort arises, at which time starting points are questioned and rival world views impose themselves. This is when a scientific revolution takes place, as during the transition from the Aristotelian to the modern notion of the concept of movement. Such a revolutionary phase forms the second kind of period identified by Kuhn.

All this is not to say that Kuhn's model is a good point of departure for the-

ories of progress. Initially, the most objectionable part of his theory of history was precisely the fact that he strongly relativized such a perspective of progress by articulating the fundamental incommensurability of different paradigms, that is, by stating that successive paradigms are not comparable from a neutral perspective because each strives to describe and explain something different. According to Kuhn, it is not that we know more about the world after such a scientific revolution; the world has simply changed.⁸ In the present context, Kuhn's theories are important for the rich historical interpretation they have yielded, an interpretation in which a much less distorted past becomes visible. His model facilitates the study of changes, without the necessity of interpreting these changes in terms of a rational progress-based reconstruction.

It is useful to apply such a model to the history of the arts when exploring the question of why and how the arts are spoken of in terms of progress, and by whom. This application of Kuhn's model to the arts is not new. In 1985, Remi Clignet published (from a slightly different perspective) *The Structure of Artistic Revolutions*, in which he applies Kuhn's distinction between 'normal science' and revolutions, to the arts. He describes how artistic paradigms become exhausted at a certain point in time, whereupon an artistic revolution takes place. In the history of painting, for example, early Pointillism offered numerous possibilities for varying the color, size, and shape of the points applied to the canvas and thus for exploring and rendering the different effects of light. But, after a while, Seurat's program had no new solutions to offer. According to Clignet, it was only after Impressionism and Pointillism 'had run their full course' that the Fauvist and Cubist revolutions could occur.⁹

By analogy to the sciences, this example illustrates the arbitrary nature of an exclusively internal approach to changes in the arts, because how do we know when a movement has run its full course? Where Pointillism is concerned, such an end can be envisaged as long as one tries not to be too precise, but in the case of Impressionism, an intrinsic description of the endpoint, when the full course has been run (or all the 'conundrums' solved) no longer seems possible. Clignet offers us no other circumstantial evidence for his claim – which, it must be admitted, would often be impossible in concrete, and thus, complex, cases. It would therefore seem to be more relevant to involve external factors (such as social structures, societal conditions, technological developments) in describing such a change, something Clignet does only incidentally and unsystematically, as a result of his conceptual broad-mindedness. For this reason, it is better to discuss external changes on the basis of Kuhn's ideas, even though in my usage *exemplars* will be granted a less important role than in Kuhn. His model of science is neither the only nor the most suitable way to comprehensively describe the functioning of art prac-

tices, but it does seem tailored to the analysis of the practical (rhetorical, strategic) use of notions of progress being discussed here.

It should be noted that Kuhn himself does devote some attention to applying his model to the arts. However, in his 'Comment on the relations of science and art,' he mostly emphasizes the differences and impossibilities of trying to make such a comparison. He mentions, among other things, that the role of the public – and thus of the acceptance of change – differs considerably and, moreover – and significantly – that the past is never definitively renounced in the arts. Rembrandt, for example, remains important, even in the wake of Picasso's success, while Galileo has definitely been relegated to history.¹⁰

According to Kuhn, a scientific revolution is often announced in the form of an anomaly that begins to manifest itself within a paradigm and, moreover, to draw attention (because anomalies as such are always visible). He then illustrates the confusion that arises in a psychological experiment carried out by Bruner and Postman, in which the latter repeatedly ask their subjects to describe the series of playing cards that has been shown to them (whereby each time the subjects are shown an increasing number of deviant cards; for example, first a red six-of-spades, then a black four-of-hearts, and so on). Initially, the subjects described the cards without difficulty, but after a while it became problematic because there was too much deviation from the normal system.¹¹

A similar confusion characterizes both scientific revolutions, as Kuhn describes them, and artistic revolutions. People begin arguing about starting points, and either a commotion results – as with the *Rite of Spring* in the history of music – or a sense of deadlock – like the one, for example, that led T.S. Eliot at the beginning of the twentieth century to consciously propagate and implement a number of innovations. It is from such confusing situations that innovations derive their sudden character, as reflected in the rhetoric of violence and destruction, and the revolutionary jargon referred to at the beginning of the previous chapter.

Moreover, the discovery of new theories often plays a role in the uncertain mood that precedes a scientific revolution.¹² Where the arts are concerned, this would be the discovery of new techniques and procedures: for example, the use of new materials like iron and concrete in nineteenth-century architecture. The discussions embarked upon by the skeptical but otherwise highly innovative designers, thinkers, and architects John Ruskin and William Morris on this subject, in their resistance to 'engineering architecture,' led one architectural historian, who is still influential today, to comment with a sigh in 1936 that

*[...] no new period in human civilization has ever arisen without an initial phase in which a complete upheaval of values took place; and such phases are not specially pleasant for contemporaries.*¹³

The major contribution of new inventions and procedures is clear. From 1759 on, for example, the new possibilities offered by the piano (especially of playing loudly and softly, and of sustaining a tone, as well as the increased volume itself) totally eclipsed the harpsichord. Perhaps it is too much to say that the piano dealt the final blow to the Baroque, but the introduction of the *Hammerklavier* incontestably had a major influence on the changing nature of music. Other new procedures also come to mind, such as the use of meaningless words in Futuristic poetry, or the 'automatic writing' of the Surrealists. Examples abound.

Kuhn notes that decisive changes in the sciences are often brought about by younger scientists or relative outsiders, that is, by those not so ensconced or trained in the existing paradigm that they can no longer abandon it.¹⁴ Thus, the most important innovation in French classical painting at the end of the eighteenth century, Jacques-Louis David's influential *Oath of the Horatii* (1784), came into existence after the painter had spent many years in Rome; T.S. Eliot had only been in England for a year when he made his debut, in 1915, with *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* and other poems; Picasso produced *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), now generally acknowledged as the first expression of Cubism, at the age of twenty-five; and Rimbaud (1854-1891) wrote his then-revolutionary poems between the ages of fifteen and twenty-one. Here, too, Kuhn's theory would seem to be applicable.

As stated previously, Kuhn sees successive paradigms as systems that cannot be judged from a neutral, higher standpoint. He sometimes even sees them as totally different world views. When one paradigm shifts to another, what can be called a *Gestalt switch* takes place: from then on something is seen completely differently.¹⁵ This is equally true in the arts. Whoever examines the different guises Hamlet has been given in the history of theater must acknowledge that only the plot of the story and the name of the main character have been retained. Over time, Hamlet has alternately been seen as a moral character (in a seventeenth-century cosmological world view); as a character in a piece more appropriately read aloud than performed (by a romantic critic like William Hazlitt); as a villain (by Wilson Knight); as a moral, neutral existentialist (by the Polish director Jan Kott); and, in many recent productions, as an ironic skeptical postmodernist. While these roles can be compared with the original role, they are nonetheless shaped on the basis of totally different world views and irreconcilable perceptions of theater. In his essay 'The Obscurity of the Poet,' R. Jarrell wrote:

[...] when the old say to us, 'What shall I do to understand Auden (or Dylan Thomas, or whoever the latest poet is)?', we can only reply: 'You must be born again.'¹⁶

It will be clear that in Kuhn's description of scientific revolutions, the social context of the changes is primary; at stake in the first place are shared values and starting points of groups and communities. Such a description also bears fruit when applied to the arts. Thus, in 1956, Dutch essayist Paul Rodenko wrote, about two major upheavals in Dutch poetry – the Eighties' Movement (toward the end of the nineteenth century) and the Fifties' Movement in the mid-twentieth century, of which he himself was a member – that the revolutionary and anarchistic inclinations of the individual poets were, in fact, irrelevant. These poets did not stand alone:

Phenomenologically, the strange thing about such a magical period of renewal is that suddenly there is a new climate, suddenly a whole range of poets uses a new idiom without being able to say who used it first. Usually, these new poets do not even form a closed group: they only do so when they discover that they are writing similar things.¹⁷

In a revolution in Kuhn's sense, one might ask what it is that brings people to adopt a new paradigm. Because Kuhn believes that arguments play a much smaller part in this than is generally assumed, he pays only limited attention to it in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Apart from the argument that a generally acknowledged, unsolvable problem can suddenly be addressed with the aid of a new vocabulary, in his view it is primarily a question of personal and 'aesthetic' considerations, whereby the new paradigm is presented as more elegant, suitable, and simple.¹⁸

Because concepts of progress have become important during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for our interpretation of cultural developments, it goes without saying that such concepts have also begun to figure in the kind of discussions that are emerging around revolutions. When something is presented as progress, it acquires both an inevitable and a normative character. This invests an enormous rhetorical power in the concept of progress.

Given the fact that Kuhn relativized this concept to a large degree in the history of science, at least insofar as progress is considered a rational process, it is understandable (although hardly necessary) that he does not make an issue about its use *within* the kind of discussions he describes. But the question of the extent to which arguments of progress have been used as a means of persuasion in scientific revolutions is not the issue here. On the other hand, where artistic revolutions are concerned, such a hypothesis is fruitful. Here, the use of the concept of progress invalidates every criticism of renewal because, as Gombrich puts it, 'in progress the irresistible drive of a superior or divine authority manifests itself.'¹⁹ In Kuhn's *The Essential Tension*, there is one sentence in relation to the arts that examines the importance of notions of progress albeit not as a rhetorical weapon in a revolution:

*Since the Renaissance at least, this innovative component of the artist's ideology [...] has done for the development of art some part of what internal crises have done to promote revolution in science.*²⁰

It may be that the ideology of progress evokes an artistic revolution, but this hypothesis, to which more attention will be paid in the last chapter of this book, is difficult to prove. For the time being, we will focus on the explicit strategic applications of notions of progress in artistic change.

The progress argument

Several cases have already been cited in which the 'progress' argument was used. Schönberg criticized 'the little Modernsky's' return to the past; Adorno did the same thing later with similar arguments. Dutch musicologist E.M. Mulder demonstrates how common such an argument is when she unmasks Adorno's attack on Stravinsky. In doing so, she uses the same strategy, ascribing to Adorno a fear of the new – the mythical dimension of content, that is – that will be announced so ominously with *Rite*. According to her, 'Adorno, armed with scientific theory, tries, out of pure impotence, to destroy the new [...].'²¹

Seen in this light, Willem Pijper's previously mentioned reproach also deserves some consideration. Pijper had studied Stravinsky's work closely and himself composed for some time in the twelve-tone system; this makes it understandable that he took sides in the musical controversy against Stravinsky, labeling Schönberg's work as progress in music. A contemporary – Dutch composer and musicologist H. Andriessen (who himself did not use the twelve-tone system) – found Pijper's position debatable. He wrote:

*The theory of progressivism deserves to be revised in the interests of music. [...] That Stravinsky risks not being seen as modern by his rivals is entirely to his credit. That risk is nobler than the concern of conforming to new requirements as much as possible. A composer is only really modern if he takes every risk and steadfastly believes in the original demands of the balance and the autonomy of each work.*²²

It is striking that in his criticism of the concept of progress, Andriessen appears neither to desire it nor to be able to totally avoid it; he toys, for example, with the notion of 'modernity.' In the paragraph following the one quoted above, he even defends himself against the accusation that he may be reactionary in this matter.

During the twentieth century, artists continually used a similar rhetoric. When, in one of the renowned Kahn Lectures, Frank Lloyd Wright raised the subject of his own use of glass, he commented:

*Shadows were the 'brush work' of the ancient Architect. Let the Modern now work with light, light diffused, light reflected – light for its own sake, shadows gratuitous. It is the Machine that makes modern these rare new opportunities in Glass.*²³

Another example is the Rodenko quotation mentioned earlier. While it appears to be historical commentary on innovation in the arts, it is, at the same time, a form of propaganda that implicitly assumes categories of progress. Where Rodenko, the leading proponent of the Fifties' Movement, states that 'suddenly there is a new climate,' he is not only describing such a climate from a neutral distance. He is also simultaneously trying to *establish* such a climate for the Fiftiers. Precisely the same two aspects can be seen in the immediately preceding comment, that poetry 'follows its own development – independent of the poets – in which it fulfils itself'; here Rodenko regards the present as the past of the future.

These examples show that notions of progress can form a not-to-be-underestimated rhetorical weapon in making artistic changes in a certain direction acceptable to outsiders and the public. For this reason, consciously or unconsciously, artistic revolutions are presented as good, necessary, and understandable. *Good* in the sense of beautiful, interesting, useful, socially relevant, comforting, cognitively enriching, and so on, depending on the time and context in which the changes are taking place. *Necessary* in a (Hegelian) logical sense, according to the rules of dialectics; or in a positivist sense, appealing to empirical laws; or in a metaphysical sense, as in the Romantic-revolutionary manner discussed at the beginning of the preceding chapter. And *understandable* to the degree that the revolutionary view of things should be convincingly presented, with a theoretical justification.

In all three cases, the way artistic changes are presented has a historical connotation. To understand this, we must first recognize that the closer we come to the present, the greater the role the past begins to play. Museums are, therefore, in the first place, historical surveys. The literature we read consists, for a large part, of classical works from previous centuries or otherwise of novels, poetry, essays, and stories that are either about the past or that take the past as their starting point. Almost every concert performed, at least in classical music, includes compositions from the past, usually in chronological order. Theater still performs classical pieces or, alternatively, new pieces inspired by them. And old classical films are shown time and time again. We document art's past, reproduce and interpret it, understand it as the context of today's art. Moreover, today's art is not only inspired by works from the past; it also quotes from them increasingly explicitly (and consciously).

All this is related to the way we experience time in general. In her 1989 Huizinga lecture at Leiden, 'Traditions of the New,' Susan Sontag convinc-

ingly described how the consciousness of Western culture has been increasingly characterized during the past two centuries by eclecticism and historical self-consciousness. According to Sontag, we see ourselves operating in history 'as both actors and spectators, as both residents and transients.'²⁴ In other words, we view the era we live in from close by but, at the same time, with historic distance, with both a magnifying glass and reversed binoculars.

In chapter one we saw how, since the end of the eighteenth century, reality came to be seen through a historical perspective, characterized by Koselleck as *historical time*. The fact that artistic changes are presented as good, necessary, and understandable acquires clear contours in the light of Koselleck's interpretation. The awareness of an open future thus provokes an active approach in those persons involved with art. The ideals that art sets for itself will no longer be realized on Judgment Day, but will have to be fought for time and again through human – and artistic – effort. People can, and therefore must, intervene in the history of art in order to pave the way to a better future.

Furthermore, the awareness of the *contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous* manifests itself, the continuous feeling that one branch of art has developed more than another, that a certain genre in another country has developed more than that in one's own country, or, conversely, that artists in one's own country are ahead of those in another. This dynamic of ostensibly equal developments occurring at different rates determines to a large degree both the psychological climate in the arts and the way changes are experienced.

But the question here is whether history as *magistra vitae* (the third characteristic of the concept of *historical time*, as discussed in chapter one) has lost that much ground, in other words whether the past has ceased to be a collection of exempla, something Koselleck believes the modern experience of time generally denies. Such a departure from an exemplary past is not found so unequivocally in the arts. Here the great works from the past still play a not-to-be-underestimated role as examples, as Kuhn has already emphasized. It is precisely this view of the past, so characteristic of the arts, this *historia magistra artis*, which has led many people to be skeptical of progress in this domain. The suspicious question would therefore be, has there ever been more beautiful music composed since Bach, or has a later book ever rivaled *Don Quixote*?²⁵ This is not to say that in the arts, historical concepts are not cast in the form of what Koselleck calls the *Kollektivsingular*, where coherent processes are grouped under a simple heading, although this may happen on a more modest scale than in other cultural domains, such as science or technology. But the expression 'the development of European music after Wagner' is not exceptional.

Finally, the modern conception of time is determined by what Koselleck describes as the growing tension between the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation.' A layered past is shaped from the perspective of the present, while the future is experienced differently, freer of the experiences

already undergone, and interlaced with expectations invested with the pragmatic dimension of, in this case, art-historical concepts. In such a consciousness of time, the names of movements come into being – the ‘isms’ – that begin to acquire a normative connotation.

Based on the historical experience of time outlined here, it will now be clear why artistic revolutions, presented as *good*, *necessary*, and *understandable*, are described and understood in terms of progress. As a *Kollektivsingular*, the concept of progress is a key historical category and therefore eminently suitable for giving a pragmatic dimension to categories of change, also in the arts.

When others need to be convinced to change their norms and basic principles, one of the most convincing strategies of argumentation is to demonstrate that the necessary change is a form of progress. This would appear to be stating the obvious, but it is only partially the case where the dynamics and potential of the concept of progress are concerned. When, after an artistic revolution, new artworks are said to be *better*, they are not more beautiful, useful, socially relevant, comforting, or cognitively enriching than *other* art works but *earlier* artworks. Because of this temporal dimension, at that moment the earlier art works have already become more or less obsolete, whereby their intrinsic qualities and therefore also their intrinsic arguments (in fact, because of the incommensurability of the different codes, paradigms, and normative systems, these qualities and arguments would not be very useful anyway) can be ignored. This is how French composer and musicologist J. Chailley opposed the advocates of twelve-tone music:

Never [...] does the dodecaphonist defend his principles. He attacks traditionalism and appeals to the necessity of a change in direction, without ever once questioning whether the direction he has chosen is a good one. After which, without the slightest transition, he considers the postulates proved that he, on his own authority, calls ‘rules’ or ‘laws.’²⁶

‘Better’ means that we have moved *further*, that whoever clings to old rules, norms, or codes regresses and, precisely because of that, falls short, as the discussions on Stravinsky have revealed. For this reason, revolution is also represented as a *necessary* event, which a conservative art-lover or artist may regret and whose acceptance he can sometimes delay, but which is inevitable because of certain historical patterns. As stated earlier, these patterns can be cast in a dialectic form, argued more empirically, or formulated in a metaphysical revolutionary jargon, but it will still always be necessary to explain why history had to take the turn that led to the present changes. This is why art has increasingly justified itself theoretically over the last few centuries; artists legitimize their work by showing that it is from this, their own, time – that it reflects the spirit of the time and therefore cannot be other than it is.

These changes also need to be made *understandable* through pamphlets, manifestoes, critiques, public meetings, and exhibitions, not to mention scandals, which sometimes occur unintentionally, as was largely the case at the première of *Rite*. But they are also often provoked consciously, as with the Dadaists. People first try to draw attention to themselves, then proceed to explain a number of things, something that can be achieved with the aid of history. In such propaganda, the revolutionaries do not limit themselves to hypothesizing the previously mentioned historical patterns. They also attempt to develop an appropriate pre-history, from which the enormous reservoir of the past can be mined, so as to identify direct predecessors and thus give shape to the 'space of experience.' Thus, we repeatedly see new trends and movements reaching back to a 'neglected' period of the past, whether it be the Spanish literary Generation of '27, which reinstated the forgotten Baroque poet Góngora, William Morris's Arts and Crafts Movement, which sought links with the artisan craftsmanship of the pre-industrial era, or the visual artists of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, whose pre-history resonates through its very name.

The linear conception of time requisite to progress is repeatedly visible in the process that makes artistic change understandable, and thus, acceptable, although metaphors like 'take a step,' 'a leap forward,' 'direction,' and the 'right track' are so common they are barely striking and are rarely absent.

Nevertheless, as was established in the previous chapter, in an artistic revolution, the *break* with the past is often emphasized simultaneously in order to show that no compromises can be made with hitherto prevailing norms. A new trend or movement can make its own artistic ideals more understandable by distinguishing them from what has already been accepted. To this end, the present is declared bankrupt, and thereby becomes historic, thus slipping into a past to make way for the new. As a result, in innovations in the arts, we often see a dual strategy with regard to the past: the recent past (still the present for others) is rejected, while at the same time an appeal is made to a more remote past. The more distant past is then redefined, to convincingly give form to the necessity and comprehensibility of the disputed upheaval.

The resistance to prevailing norms and codes is always so strong at moments of change that art historian Gombrich even believes

it is not so much the common ideals which determine a period as it is the common antipathies. These antipathies fortunately still allow the young artist sufficient room to do what he wishes – good or bad – provided he does not lose sight of social taboos.²⁷

Such an observation, however, is determined mainly by a contemporary view: a new artistic paradigm can always be found after the fact, because otherwise

a period or movement cannot be recognized and as such would therefore not even exist.

In conclusion, there is one last reason why arguments of progress are so frequently applied to the arts. The vocabulary of progress also emerges when general discussions of cultural and social change take place, partly on the grounds mentioned above. Whoever advocates such changes often sees the arts as the vanguard of society, as the scout of social and cultural processes. As chapter three revealed, such a view tends to prevail in avant-garde movements, which, after all, are out to abolish the dividing line between society and art. French Surrealism, which promoted a universal mental revolution with far-reaching social consequences, is a case in point. In the propaganda for a Surrealistic revolution, Utopian-socialist ideas and historical-materialistic philosophy went hand-in-hand with an ambitious program 'to free the unconscious,' in which aesthetic activity was central as both a means and an end. During the nineteenth century, too, we repeatedly see a plea for progress in the arts as part of the driving force of social change, for example, in the Arts and Crafts Movement.

The periodizing museum

Despite the frequent rearranging of the furniture of the past, the history of the arts gradually takes on a more definite form. This form arose largely during the nineteenth century. Before that time, one scarcely spoke in terms of stylistic periods, such as the Baroque or Renaissance, let alone of the orderly succession of such periods. In 1781, museum director Christian von Mechel reorganized the paintings in the Gemäldegalerie of the Belvedere Castle in Vienna. Instead of grouping them according to the traditional criteria of subject and format, he hung them in chronological order and according to their school.²⁸ Some fifty years later, as we saw in the previous chapter, F. Kugler published one of the first histories of the visual arts. Here, the history of the entire world, from pre-history onward, was taken into consideration, a history in which art did not reach its peak in its own time, as in Hegel. A similar development began during the nineteenth century in literary history and in the history of music. Analogous to this scholarly activity, instruction in the history of the arts gradually developed with time, and a historical canon was established.

Since then, the history of the arts has become an enormous museum, constructed during the nineteenth century after several foundations had already been laid in the preceding century. The rooms of this museum are frequently rearranged, and the greater part of the building consists of wings that were added later, but the original layout, which divides the history of art into a number of stylistic periods, has scarcely changed.

Who arranges museums and builds these new wings? Who, in fact, introduces this periodization? In principle, it is those directly involved with art, those who write its history and actively participate in the 'art discourse' – the totality of discussions, claims, statements, theories, and reflections that position art hierarchically. In addition to the artworks themselves (which, as stated earlier, also play a part in the discourse), it includes artists and, at some a distance, (not-too-theoretical) critics and other intermediaries (gallery owners, publishers, impresarios, grant-givers, curators, advisors, magazine editors, and so on). After this come the more distant theoretically based critics, art scholars, art historians, aestheticians, and, finally, the public, who reads, looks, listens, and develops an opinion.

The fact that the non-professional public occupies the last place in this list is not evidence of the avant-gardist *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (disdain for the public). It is simply a result of the observation that the public (at least the general public) usually adopts the point of view of the preceding groups. In so-called 'Pop Art,' however, and the arts of the last few decades, where mass culture and the more elite, or 'higher' forms, of cultural expression increasingly mix, this is less so. The role of the public has undeniably grown and is continuing to do so.

Once artistic innovations in the arts have been accepted by the influential figures directly involved with art, they become canonized, after which they are gradually given more attention by the public and the academic community. The process of historical situating and systematic placing in relation to other developments is subsequently thoroughly repeated by the latter, but, strikingly enough, without revolutionary consequences for the already existing structure of the past. The history of the future is written in the present by those directly involved, and later worked out in broad lines by art scholars; historical representation is thus mostly a contemporary and biased phenomenon. The position of Impressionism in art history, or of the naturalistic novel in the history of literature, was determined more by the Impressionists or the Naturalists than by later impartial historians. As we saw earlier, actors in the arts make history in two ways: by acting and, through that acting, by interpreting and situating.

This applies by and large to the last two centuries, but of course not to older art: that came into existence at a time when the historical consciousness described above – and therefore the possibility of periodization in Koselleck's *historical time* – did not yet exist. Naturally, the van Eyck brothers were considered great painters in their day, but they did not claim a place for themselves in history the way, for example, the Abstract Expressionists later did; they were only assigned such a place later, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

No matter how permanent the periods and the canon appear to be at any given time, the interpretation of the past remains changeable. In his classic work *Soziologie der Kunst*, Hauser rightly observes:

The genesis of artworks is far from being completed when their makers release them. Artworks continue the metamorphosis that comprises their presence, acquiring not only new unforeseen qualities, but also a new meaning that would have seemed incomprehensible to a previous generation, and often even strange. Historically speaking, they are never complete, and because they come into being incomplete, they do not disappear forever from people's field of vision. The space of a museum or the chapter of a textbook often seems too limited for them; they move constantly between birth, apparent death, and renaissance.²⁹

Nevertheless, it is more appropriate to say this is applicable to individual artworks and shifts of emphasis (often the result of the previously mentioned tendency to create a pre-history in order to pave the way for an intended change) than to say that the universal scheme of periodization is under threat. Whoever compares art history surveys from the early twentieth century with more recent surveys will notice that the universal structure of the history of the arts is seldom under attack.

Hauser may be correct when he writes that the dogmas of periodization, segmentation, or cyclicity in history, dialectical stages, an historical fate, continual progress, or decline are merely variations of a historical-philosophical mysticism. But, in reality, the participants in the art discourse make unremitting use of such dogmas, and, as we have seen above, primarily of those dogmas that are in some way related to the concept of progress.³⁰

It would appear to be difficult to find one's bearings in history without reference to some kind of stable structure. For now, the need for historical situating seems to be unavoidable. Even the most postmodern and eclectic plagiarist approaches the past with a topography in mind. The same applies to every artist who claims a new place for himself. How can she or he be revolutionary and represent progress if there is no clearly anchored tradition with which to compare the innovations?

Progress as aporia

A disturbing problem remains that rears its head whenever the present comes into view, a problem that might be described as 'postmodern confusion.' A distinction was made earlier in this chapter between two kinds of periods: the first, analogous to Kuhn's 'normal science,' in which there is a totality of artistic standard forms of expression, which is equated to a system of norms, a 'period code,' or a number of more or less coherent characteristics of what later will be described as a trend, movement, generation, or paradigm; the second, where one speaks of 'artistic revolutions,' in which such things as norms, exemplars, and accepted procedures suddenly change. In itself, it is

not entirely problematic that this is a rather schematic description of the situation, but during the course of the twentieth century, the gap between the description and the practices of the arts widened enormously.

At the beginning of the last century, there were already what can be called warning signs against the unbridled application of the progressive scheme. Viennese art historian Hans Tietze, for example, pays attention to the influence of ideas of progress on the arts in his *Lebendige Kunstwissenschaft. Zur Krise der Kunst und der Kunstgeschichte* (1925; *The Living Science of Art: The Crisis in Art and Art History*). In an essay on Expressionism, Tietze, a modern art advocate who supported the young Kokoschka, contemplated how it was possible that something once proclaimed as the style of the future could be dismissed as outdated only twelve years later. He was skeptical about the

polonaise of 'isms,' whose ever-increasing tempo ultimately resulted in the grotesque: between the spring and fall 'salons,' unbridgeable chasms emerged, the developmental periods of the young geniuses were kept track of monthly, and the works themselves were outdated before they were even dry.³¹

Tietze posed a question that, with the growing use of the rhetoric of progress and the phenomenon of an accelerating alternation and succession of art trends, movements, and generations, became increasingly pressing in the course of the century. As a result of the avant-garde's influential ideology of progress, the idea of art as *permanent revolution* took root among those who were most directly involved with art: radical innovation became the most important *raison d'être* for every work of art as well as the primary criterion for judging it, and thus also for historically situating it. The distinction between normal and revolutionary periods made earlier in this chapter now threatens to become obsolete. Art continued to be interpreted historically but, through the blurring of the line between 'paradigm' and 'revolution,' general confusion arose that closely resembles the playing-card experiment referred to by Kuhn. On the one hand, notions of progress have been used so often that they have become completely threadbare and meaningless. At the same time, despite all the postmodern ammunition they must endure, they form such a substantial factor in our experience of time, in our interpretation of and orientation in modern-day art, that reflection on these concepts inevitably leads to an aporia. Countless writings by art theorists, art historians, critics, and artists from the last few decades exude this confusion, speaking incessantly of crisis, of the end of art history, and even the end of art itself, as we saw with Arthur Danto. The problem formulated by German art historian Hans Belting,

that contemporary art indeed reflects the established history of art, while not bringing this history 'forward,' and (...) that the history of art as a subject today no longer produces a synthetic model for the description of historic art

is representative of many similar expressions of skepticism toward the once so carefreely advancing 'Freight Train of Art History.'³²

While this does not render useless the distinction proposed in this chapter between stable and revolutionary periods in the arts, it does somewhat limit its current value. At times, progress seems to dissolve in such a complex totality of meanings and intuitions that further analysis of today's confusion seems warranted. The requisite attention will be paid to this confusion in the last two chapters of this book. The primary purpose at this point is to examine the use of notions of progress during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The practice of art can, of course, be described in terms other than those used in Kuhn's model. Over the last decades, for example, especially in the work of French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu, there has been great interest in the perspective of social *distinction*. In this approach, the realm of the arts is seen as the battlefield for various social groups, which distinguish themselves from one another by participation or exclusion.³³ A similar perspective on the practice of the arts is that of *competition*. Here, the market model explains art production and reception. This economic perspective is also sociologically relevant, given that human behavior is always – and this is no less true in the arts – motivated by power struggles and ambition whereby certain groups constantly strive to make *their* opinion the prevailing one.³⁴ Lastly, the practice of art can be characterized by looking at the related mechanism of *selection*, that is, at the way artists and artworks are placed in a certain hierarchy on the basis of training, public success, subsidies, and so on.

Yet the Kuhn-inspired model described above has the advantage that it helps clarify the use of notions of progress, because such notions manifest themselves more clearly in the transition phase from one normative system or paradigm to another than when a perspective of distinction, competition, or selection is applied. Furthermore, we shall see that even in the perspective of selection, the argument of progress is a much-used and successful tool. But applying this perspective may be more difficult to combine with developments in the arts themselves.

The practice of the arts outlined in this chapter and the history of ideas of progress in the arts described earlier have been interlaced with examples. But these examples have often been of a random nature. To this end, a more coherent example will be presented now, namely the innovation in the visual arts and architecture as propagated and initiated by the De Stijl movement.

5 Innovation in Painting and Architecture: De Stijl

*Will the backwardness of the masses
make perfect life impossible even in the remote future?
This is of no importance to evolution, which continues regardless,
and with evolution alone we must reckon.
(Mondriaan, *De Stijl* V, 3, 1922, 44)¹*

Abstraction and the beauty of a grain silo

The staging of a retrospective exhibition on De Stijl at the American Walker Art Center and various museums in the Netherlands in 1982 established the place of this movement as one of the keys to modernism. According to Mildred Friedman, then-Design Curator of the Walker Art Center, writing fifty years after the publication of the last issue of the journal of the same name, the De Stijl movement was a

*focus for wide-ranging invention in painting, architecture, furniture and graphic design.*²

This observation is somewhat problematic, however, because anyone who encounters such a statement in an art history handbook would be inclined to dismiss it as rhetorical. In fact, De Stijl is not as pivotal as Friedman suggests, unless modernism is interpreted as broadly as the present-day inflation of this term allows, or unless one limits oneself to reading monographs on only this movement or one of its protagonists. Dutch art historian Hans Jaffé, for example, in keeping with the movement itself, characterized De Stijl at the time as a *signpost*, a beacon, a standard for change in the history of mankind, which was forever moving toward perfection.³

Such an appraisal of De Stijl as a standard for art or even mankind is rather exaggerated for a movement that consisted of a loosely organized and mercurial group of artists, which existed only on paper and was kept together by a thin little journal with a one-man editorial staff that appeared with decreasing frequency and was written mostly in Dutch. Furthermore, the number of distributed copies of the journal, titled *De Stijl*, never exceeded a few hundred,

and the tone of the opening words of the introduction to the first issue, which appeared in October 1917 and was intended as a manifesto, was modest:

The object of this little periodical is to contribute toward the development of a new awareness of beauty.

To this overture, however, the editor and the seminal figure of the movement, Theo van Doesburg, added the following:

It wishes to make modern man receptive to what is new in the visual arts. Against archaistic confusion [...] it poses the logical principles of a maturing style based on a pure relationship between the spirit of the time and the means of expression. It seeks to combine in itself current ideas regarding the 'new plastic' [nieuwe beelding], which, although basically the same, have developed independently of one another.⁴

In other words, in *De Stijl*, van Doesburg was attempting to bring together a number of innovations. From the beginning, his attention was focused on painting, architecture, and design from an international perspective, in line with prevailing trends like Futurism and Cubism. The announcement, made a few months earlier, of the forthcoming journal *De Stijl*, listed Picasso and Archipenko among its foreign members, and an article by the Italian Futurist artist Gino Severini appeared in the second issue.

It remains to be seen whether *De Stijl* was the exclusive culmination of the many extensive developments in the visual arts and architecture that took place at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. There is, however, wide agreement about the historic importance of the movement, owing to the much-celebrated work of Mondrian, Oud, and Rietveld.

In the years before van Doesburg founded *De Stijl*, he was active as a poet, painter and designer; he also wrote extensively on those innovations in art that he so fervently sought.⁵ Fed by this conviction, he had nurtured the idea of launching a journal for some time. Under the influence of Kandinsky's *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* (1910; *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*), he attached great importance to the spiritual significance of art, like many other artists of his generation. In his view, art must no longer portray the natural, material reality but a higher, more spiritual one. To this end, he believed art had to do away with tradition and become purely abstract.

After 1915, he became acquainted with the work of Piet Mondrian, of Hungarian-born painter Vilmos Huszár, and of painter Bart van der Leek, each of whom in his own way had incorporated an increasing abstraction into his visual work. He established contact with these painters, as well as with architects Jan Wils and J.J.P. Oud. Also important for the launching of *De Stijl* was

the meeting between Bart van der Leck and Mondrian, the latter who had come to the Netherlands from Paris for a family visit just before the outbreak of the First World War but, owing to the German invasion, been unable to return. Their joint stay in the village of Laren and the reciprocal influences that resulted, led to a new way of painting, which the ever-alert van Doesburg immediately noticed and praised. The 'new plastic' (*nieuwe beelding*) that he sought was, for the first time, convincingly interpreted through the work of these artists.

In his classic study on De Stijl, Jaffé describes the origins of this movement with respect to painting, as a chemical reaction resulting from the merging of three elements.⁶ In the first place, there was a Cubist tradition, dating from Cézanne's attempts to reduce natural forms to geometric ones, a path followed primarily by Mondrian. Then there was the innovation in murals and monumental art as rooted in the Arts and Crafts Movement, Jugendstil, and Symbolism, and as influenced by Seurat's work insofar as it sought an objective visual vocabulary and focused on a two-dimensional surface. Van der Leck is mentioned in this context. And, lastly, there was the theorization of expressionistic abstraction by, among others, Kandinsky, which would eventually lead to the banning of every intrinsic reference to reality. It was found most clearly in van Doesburg.

De Stijl ideas on architecture were based partly on those of the painters among its ranks. But they were also influenced by the innovations of architect H.P. Berlage, and by Frank Lloyd Wright, whose work was introduced into the Netherlands by the architect Robert van 't Hoff. More general views on mass production, the use of new materials, and magnitude of scale also had a significant impact.

In the course of 1917, van Doesburg succeeded in convincing Mondrian, van der Leck, Huszár, Oud, and Wils, along with several others to collaborate on a new journal. The first edition of *De Stijl* appeared in October of that year. The demonstrative use of the definite article 'de' in its name (*De Stijl* means *the style*) is significant: the idea was that the artists would demonstrate in this journal *the style* that would be appropriate for the new era.⁷

The program underlying this ideal can be distilled from the first few volumes as well as from publications by contributors to *De Stijl* issued elsewhere. The program had both a constructive and a destructive component, because in the eyes of the contributors, the old was to be abolished to make way for the new. Accordingly, De Stijl's ideals were continually presented in the form of conceptual oppositions.

The ultimate goal of the movement was to achieve the triumph of absolute harmony over an imperfect and chaotic world, a Utopian ideal most explicitly formulated by Mondrian. The most important tenet of the program was the desire to strive toward the universal as opposed to the individual. For the pro-

ponents of the movement, this opposition was closely allied to those of the spiritual versus the material, the abstract versus the concrete (or the natural), the objective versus the subjective, and the rational versus the emotional.

Such, often overlapping, oppositions stem partly from theosophical thought, which heavily influenced Mondrian. The work of the Laren-based mathematician and esoteric philosopher Dr. M.H.J. Schoenmaekers is also usually mentioned in this context. The term 'plastic' (*beelding*) appeared frequently in his work, together with a plea for the use of primary colors and orthogonal representation. Although Schoenmaekers's theoretical contribution is sometimes overrated, he remains important with regard to the movement's terminology and as a catalyst in its search for a new visual language.⁸

The oppositions mentioned above were further derived from the work of Dutch neo-Hegelian philosopher G.J.P.J. Bolland, who had a major influence on Dutch artists at the time. German art historians such as Wilhelm Worringer and Heinrich Wölfflin were also influential, especially where van Doesburg was concerned. Worringer's *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (1918; *Abstraction and Empathy*) assumed that the history of art took place somewhere between two extremes: abstraction, or spirituality, and nature, or materialism. Similarly, Wölfflin's famous *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe* (1915; *Principles of Art History*) developed a number of conceptual oppositions that continued to haunt van Doesburg's theories for a number of years.⁹ (Wölfflin's five famous, more or less categorical, style oppositions were: 1) the linear versus the painterly, 2) flatness versus depth, 3) closed forms versus open forms, 4) multiplicity versus unity, and 5) clarity versus obscurity.) Lastly, the oppositions that continually reappeared in *De Stijl* were taken from a number of periodicals and pamphlets written by artists from all over Europe: in addition to Kandinsky's previously mentioned *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, this included mainly the militant prose of the Futurists.

Van Doesburg and Mondrian, the most important *De Stijl* theorists, constantly appeal to such oppositions, especially those between the positive and the negative, the male and the female, the vertical and the horizontal, closed forms and open forms, multiplicity and unity, and the clear and the vague. At the same time, these oppositions function in a dialectical process in which, through synthesis in a 'new plastic,' they will be superseded.

Although such a large number of imprecisely defined concepts may appear confusing, things become clearer the moment the proposed theories and arguments are applied to the artworks produced and propagated by *De Stijl*. Anyone who studies the development of Mondrian's early visual work quickly acquires a sense of structural oppositions. After all, the theory results from the realization of the art works, as van Doesburg announced on page one of the journal's first issue.

The same applies to the process of abstraction: a look at the early work of

Huszár, van der Leek, Mondrian, and van Doesburg clarifies in a fascinating way how each artist attempted, individually, to abandon the figurative representation of reality (or, to use the De Stijl vocabulary, the 'natural plasticity'). A specific realistic depiction of a cow by van Doesburg was thus redepicted in such a way that a universal image of *the* cow emerged; Mondrian transformed a church tower and a seaside pier into the general oppositions of the horizontal and the vertical; and, in his *Hammer and Saw*, reproduced in *De Stijl* (I, 3, 1918), Huszár reduced the essential functions of these tools to (horizontal and vertical) movement.

For De Stijl, the opposition of the universal to the individual implied the simultaneous rejection of the subjective and the emotional. In this, the movement was clearly agitating against the newly emerging Expressionism. The universal approach further sought to exclude individual, contingent phenomena; as a result, ornamentation, and, in reality, every personal embellishment, was taboo. This included the oblique angle and the curved line (van Doesburg pejoratively dismissed them as 'baroque'). The classic means of expression for De Stijl were the rectangle (that is, straight lines and right angles), primary colors, and the 'non'-colors of white, gray, and black.

The De Stijl principles can also be found in many forms in its theories on architecture (although there was fundamental disagreement about the relationship between painting and architecture, as we shall see). In the first place, the De Stijl's interest in mass production in building was as an expression of 'the universal' and a resistance to individual subjectivity. The writings on architecture thus wanted nothing to do with 'crafts' in the tradition of Ruskin and Morris; moreover, De Stijl architects preferred to design streets rather than houses. In an almost intentional provocation, one issue of *De Stijl* depicted an airplane hangar and a grain silo in the US, that had been designed by engineers and not by 'artists.' De Stijl argued for a more consistent use of new technologies and materials based on 'rationality,' and rejected all ornamentation. (It made life very difficult for the Amsterdam School, which was emerging in those years and used a lot of craft-inspired ornamentation in its architecture.) Preference was given to the forms of Neo-Plasticism, that is, to right angles, the balanced (but asymmetrical) horizontal-vertical division of space, and the use of the primary colors, together with white, black, and gray.

Viewed from a broader perspective, the De Stijl movement emerged in what can be seen as a striking vacuum. The Netherlands remained neutral during the First World War, and had, as a result, already been isolated in a cultural sense for a number of years. While the world had been at war, and near the Dutch border massive atrocities had been taking place on one of the largest battlefields of all history, a group of artists was developing a Utopian program that seemed to pay very little attention to that reality. Elsewhere in the world, nineteenth-century progressive optimism was being put to the test

by reality in the harshest way, while the belief of the De Stijl artists in a better future was growing, and few words were wasted on the war being waged all around it. When the World War *was* mentioned in its journal, the tone was not one of pessimism about mankind, but rather of near-triumph, for example, where it observed that the ‘World War’ had now definitively destroyed old culture.¹⁰ And, while large-scale armies were attacking one another with a vast arsenal of technological advancements, De Stijl architects and theorists were observing great opportunities for a better world based on this massive scale and these new technologies.

Yet De Stijl was far from other-worldly, and as soon as the borders were reopened, the international orientation of this budding movement flourished. At the same time, however, the level of discussion in the journal often varied radically, from debating in an international forum to quibbling about the director of the art academy in Haarlem, or to addressing snide remarks to ‘a Frisian Daily’ or the marginal magazine *De Stem* of Dirk Coster and his friends, with their ‘little literary pamphlets reeking of preacherly pathos.’¹¹

The observation that the De Stijl movement lacked critical reflection on the achievements of technology reveals a degree of historical distortion, given that this kind of reflection on the mass destruction facilitated by the new technologies only became common after the First World War. The question remains, though, whether the example from De Stijl described below substantiates the frequently made claim that the First World War was responsible for a radical shift in thought on progress.¹²

The aim of this chapter is not to give another general historical survey of this movement. By now, that history has been amply described and documented. Instead, I intend to examine empirically what I have asserted earlier in this book, and to illustrate it on the basis of a select quantity of material. In principle, the texts and images of the *De Stijl* journal will form my starting point. A movement like De Stijl easily lends itself to such an approach, because a number of collaborators, especially van Doesburg, Mondrian, and Oud, believed it was important to convey their aims and new ideas in writing, and, what is more, they did it too. The task of the artist, wrote van Doesburg, in the previously cited introduction to the first issue, was twofold:

*first, to create purely plastic art; second, to make the public receptive to the beauty of purely plastic art.*¹³

Another constraint this book imposes upon itself is to focus exclusively on the visual arts and architecture, whereas in fact De Stijl encompassed other domains as well, such as poetry (especially van Doesburg, under the pseudonym of I.K. Bonset), design (primarily Rietveld), abstract film (Hans Richter),

and music and dance (Mondrian), not to speak of the more or less artistically intended prose of Aldo Camini, van Doesburg's alter alter ego.

Three questions will structure the ensuing discussion of the collected volumes of *De Stijl*. First, did De Stijl members or sympathizers themselves consider changes in the visual arts and architecture a form of progress, and if so, what, in their view, was the nature of that progress? Second, how did De Stijl members use the rhetoric of progress (concepts such as 'evolution,' 'modern,' or 'historical imperative'), and did such notions play a part in what I have earlier referred to as an 'artistic revolution'? And, lastly, a question that cannot be answered on the basis of the texts from the *De Stijl* journal, namely, to what extent did *later* critics and art historians interpret these changes as progress, in other words, how did De Stijl gain its place in art history?

My primary focus will be on the early volumes of *De Stijl*, not only because the volumes of the first three years (up to and including 1920) contain more than half of the journal's theoretical writings, but also because the most important participants of the movement are represented there and all of the fundamental ideas treated in those first years. From 1921 on, the theoretical position and coherence of the De Stijl group became less stable owing to other intrinsic artistic developments and changing circumstances. Thanks to van Doesburg, the Dadaist content rapidly increased, and there was a growing intertwinement with new developments in other art forms, such as literature and film, as well as with the ever-changing constellation of progressive foreign movements. Important collaborators such as van der Leek, van 't Hoff, and (temporarily) Huszár had already broken with De Stijl, followed by Oud in 1922. Tensions between van Doesburg and Mondrian grew at this time, culminating in a decisive split around 1925.

In 1925, van Doesburg did not yet explicitly distance himself from the original De Stijl ideas, but beginning with the seventh volume of *De Stijl*, that is from 1926 on (no. 73/74), he postulated viewpoints that he himself would have subjected to the severest of criticism if they had appeared earlier.¹⁴ In *De Stijl* VII, 75/76 (1926-27), he proclaimed the so-called 'Elementarism' as a way of overcoming 'the static' in Neo-Plasticism. In his 'Manifesto Fragment,' published in this same issue, he introduced – following the achievements of the classical, the Cubist, and the neo-plastic compositions – the idea of a fourth stage, of the 'ELEMENTARY (ANTI-STATIC) COUNTER-COMPOSITION,' which facilitates 'not only orthogonal, but also oblique, combined, and simultaneous constructions' (38-39). In this sense it is amusing to see how, in the cover design for his publication *Klassiek, Barok, Modern* (the text of a lecture he gave in 1920), van Doesburg still disparagingly set the word 'baroque' in diagonal typography, whereas here, on the back cover of the 1927 anniversary issue of *De Stijl*, the word 'Elementarism' screams persuasively from the cover in large, diagonally set capital letters.¹⁵

In the issues of the new avant-garde magazine *i 10*, which began to be published in that same year, contributions appeared from the hand of nearly all the members of the early volumes of *De Stijl*, apart from van Doesburg himself. Although this tireless pioneer was the pivotal figure and organizer of the movement from its inception, in later years he *became* the journal, to such an extent that it is no longer possible to talk of a true movement. By that time, *De Stijl* had become an international forum for an often highly divergent group of avant-garde artists, with van Doesburg as the all-powerful impresario of the theater and, at the same time, the artist who performed the most roles.

The new style and the spirit of the time

This was quite a different situation from when *De Stijl* began. At that time, although van Doesburg was no less the initiator, driving force, and sole editor of the journal, others, too, made substantial contributions to the theorization and formulation of an artistic program. By far the most important contributions were those (for all the members, initially influential) articles by Mondrian, who set forth his theory in the first volume, in a series of eleven essays entitled 'The New Plastic in Painting.' He began his essay thus:

The life of modern cultured man is gradually turning away from the natural: life is becoming more and more abstract.

As the natural (the external) becomes more and more 'automatic,' we see life's interest fixed more and more on the inward. The life of truly modern man is directed neither toward the material for its own sake nor toward the predominantly emotional: rather, it takes the form of the autonomous life of the human spirit becoming conscious. (I, I, 1917, 2)

What immediately becomes apparent here is the extent to which Mondrian thought in terms of conceptual oppositions (traceable partly to Hegelian dialectics and partly to theosophy): the 'natural' is opposed to the (gradually more) 'cultivated,' implying increasing abstraction and inwardness as a reaction to the external and empirical aspects of the 'natural.' The material and the emotional are to be overcome by a synthesis of the body and the soul, in the 'spirit.'

Such a development in art would ultimately lead to the Neo-Plasticism envisaged by Mondrian: neither a representation of a visible 'material' reality nor an expression of how that reality is subjectively experienced, but a depiction of what, in line with German idealism, could be called a direct representation of the essence of reality. Neo-Plasticism was not about rendering the phenomenal world, but about a disinterested, objective contemplation of the

noumenal, about 'the appearance of the aesthetic idea in itself,' at which point Mondrian, by way of clarification, refers to Schopenhauer's aesthetic principles.¹⁶

The metaphysical-historicizing tone of this opening passage is representative of many articles in *De Stijl*: a specific development and a specific spirit of the time are identified that will inevitably lead to Neo-Plasticism. In a piece inspired partly by Bolland, Huszár thus writes:

If we consider the spiritual growth of mankind in the Universe, as it has developed thus far, we observe in spiritual life everywhere the general pursuit of rational thought or of a growing human awareness; this continues to develop and attempts to realize and express itself everywhere. (II, 1, 1918, 8)

What rational thought and awareness comprised was eminently clear to the reader of *De Stijl*, namely, the mentality expressed in Neo-Plasticism. In his plea for a universal, 'machine' architecture, Oud proclaims:

Where architecture has already become plastic via mechanical methods (Wright) – and painting is consequently driven to this plasticism – a unity automatically appears in the pure expression of the spirit of the time. (II, 3, 1918, 26)

The idea of the spirit of the time (*Zeitgeist*), derived from Hegelian thought, was more than just a vague slogan for *De Stijl*. Mondrian and van Doesburg, like Oud, saw the increasingly important machine power of their era as universally displacing individual 'natural' power. Mondrian went on to illustrate the changing spirit of the time through fashion, where he observed a 'characteristic tensing of form and intensification of color that signifies the departure from the natural.' Similarly, as a lover of modern dance, the 'dancing madonna' (as his friends in Laren called him at the time) saw the straight line of the tango, the step, and the boston as replacing the curved line of the classical waltz.¹⁷

The focus on the spirit of the time reflects the inherent importance of the general, the universal, about which *De Stijl* felt so strongly. The universal was to be expressed and, thus, distance taken from the empirical, 'natural' representation. The 'essence of all emotion of plastic beauty' was achieved through the abstraction of form and color, by 'an exact plastic of pure relationship.' While it is true that color and form were still used in Neo-Plasticism, they were radically abstracted – into primary and 'non'-colors, and straight lines and right angles or, as Mondrian called it, a 'duality of position' (I, 1, 1917, 3-4; I, 3, 1918, 29).

The movement's artistic program was far from complete when the first issues of its journal appeared in 1917. Neither Mondrian nor other painters

yet worked in the style of the canvases that Mondrian would later produce, in the 1920s, and that, retrospectively, would be seen as De Stijl's most representative work. The struggle to abandon figurative ('natural') reality is forever palpable. Thus, a few pages after Mondrian's text on abstraction, van Doesburg discusses van der Leek's *Ezelrijders* (Donkey Riders), reproduced in the same issue of *De Stijl* (I, 1, 1917, 11), and taken from the theme of 'donkey riders in a Spanish landscape.' Initially, similar discussions on painting and sculpture appeared regularly in the journal. De Stijl's iconoclasm was far from a thunderbolt; rather, it was a battle fought over an extended period of time.

The starting point for De Stijl members was the quest for spiritual and universal harmony. While in painting this led to abstraction and the visual vocabulary described above, in architecture it was a much more complicated matter, as we shall soon see. De Stijl attempted to stimulate the integration of painting and architecture (and other art forms) in various ways, but from the outset this led to mutual problems of competence between the two disciplines.

This was already evident in van der Leek's article 'The Place of Modern Painting in Architecture,' where he emphatically claimed more space for painting. The article was doubtless also a reaction to his personal experiences as an interior designer, especially with Berlage; van der Leek was anything but charmed by the idea of having to act as 'a kind of luxury house-painter' and to choose the color scheme 'for an environment which, monumentally, [...] would bring him no credit at all.'¹⁸ In the same issue of *De Stijl*, Mondrian places painting above architecture, because painting is 'the most consistent expression of pure relationships':

In painting the dualities of relationship can be placed in juxtaposition to one another (on one plane), which is impossible in architecture or sculpture. Thus, painting can indeed be the most purely 'plastic.' (I, 1, 1917, 3-4)

A number of innovations in painting had an undeniable influence on the intended changes in architecture, such as the use of primary colors, the balanced relationship between horizontal and vertical elements, and the avoidance of oblique corners (such as sloping roofs). Other innovations, however, had a specifically architectural character. The new technologies that were propagated, for example, steel and concrete construction, had no immediate counterpart in painting. Similarly, the propaganda for machine production was more geared to opposing craftsmanship in the tradition of Ruskin and Morris and more a sign of enthusiasm for the Futurist élan than it was a development of Mondrian's principles of Neo-Plasticism.

An extensive vocabulary of concepts of progress is readily found in *De Stijl*'s articles and writings. To begin with, the idea of the spirit of the time

continually reappears: the idea that history has reached a certain stage that may indeed not yet be understood by everyone but which nonetheless indisputably announces itself through countless changes, and which will attain its purest form in Neo-Plasticism.

When Mondrian thus speaks of 'truly modern' man, by 'truly' he is referring primarily to something metaphysical; not to someone who allows himself to be carried away by contingent, contemporary events, but to someone who is modern because he realizes what is *essential* for the culture of his day. According to De Stijl, one's own era is the result of a spiritual development or, as it was phrased in the earlier quotation from Huszár, 'the spiritual growth of mankind in the Universe.' The real new art, however, is often poorly received because man finds it difficult to break with tradition and therefore to keep pace with progress. It is this notion, identified by Koselleck as the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous,' that reappears where Paul Colin cites Jean Cocteau:

When a work of art seems to be ahead of its time, it is simply because its time lags behind it. (II, II, 1919, 127)

Innovation in architecture

There is no doubt that the De Stijl architects themselves viewed the new architecture they propagated in terms of progress. Two articles from the third issue of volume one of *De Stijl* substantiate this. In 'Art and Machine,' Oud places the development of modern art in a social context:

Great art is causally related to the social aims of the day. The desire to subordinate the individual to the social is seen in both everyday life and art, as reflected in the need to organize individual elements into groups: associations, societies, companies, trusts, monopolies, etc.¹⁹

A few pages later, Jan Wils makes a similar observation in 'The New Architecture' (I, 3, 1918, 31-33), adding to those groups the million-man-strong armies. Not, indeed, as a desirable development, but rather as a sign of the inevitable course of events that was taking place everywhere at the time.

According to Wils, the architect must satisfy the modern requirements of beauty and efficiency – 'strangely' enough, 'thanks to the materials found through technological progress' that meet these requirements, such as concrete, steel, plate glass, and seamless wall and floor constructions. People, he went on, are still 'afraid' to apply them consistently and use them 'as if they were old familiar materials (stone and wood).' This is just as strange as the

absurdity of us, with our totally changed views on life, living in houses with layouts dating from the era of Louis XVI. (I, 3, 1918, 32-33)

De Stijl envisaged large-scale, serial, standardized production in architecture, aided by the newest materials. In this, it believed it was ahead of other progressive movements. In 1918, Oud complained that at a recently held 'Housing Conference,' not only the architects but *even* the Marxist workers resisted the establishment of standard types of housing. He could imagine that the architects would not give up 'their own doors and windows [...] without a fight,' but the Marxists, of all people, should at least have been receptive to the future savings for the community that would result from mass production, not to mention the aesthetic advantages (I, 7, 1918, 78).

The De Stijl architects made several attempts to provide a new pre-history for the innovations they were seeking. Jan Wils, for example, tried to make intelligible the form of expression of 'harmony without symmetry' that was so important to De Stijl, by using a comprehensive (but still incomplete) model of development devised by Adolf Meyer, a Bauhaus participant and Walter Gropius's assistant. In 'Symmetry and Culture' (I, 12, 1918, 137-40), he described the development of the phenomenon of symmetry in seven stages. The starting point was the radial symmetry, 'developed in three sectional planes at the same time,' of the regular crystalline structure. This symmetry corresponds in nature to 'the egg cell, the micrococci,' and in culture, to the ball and the cube. The next stage was radial symmetric; it was developed equally in two sectional planes (with the bacterium and the thread-like algae corresponding to the cask and the drum, respectively), and so on, until total asymmetry was achieved. It is with these that – after plants and the lower and higher species of animals in earlier stages – human beings and 'complex machines' correspond, respectively.

Wils subsequently unleashed this model on the history of architecture, beginning with the round temple of the Greeks. The result was a curious and not always comprehensible history of architecture that made great leaps and included strange ad hoc comments. Here is a sample:

These buildings [medieval churches] are monosymmetric and, according to the table above, are at the same level of development as the higher animals.

What applies to religious architecture is equally applicable to the secular.

At the level of development of the plants, for example, are the stacked cuttings (the open haystack) and the mill.

Most public buildings are monosymmetric; they are therefore not higher than the higher animals. (I, 12, 1918, 139)

Nevertheless, it was still clear where this development would lead: 'The absolute leads to the asymmetrical' (I, 12, 1918, 140).

Here, Wils's ideas about the history of architecture had an evolutionary character. In the previously quoted 'The New Architecture,' however, he used the more revolutionary vocabulary of the 'break with history' that was so characteristic of avant-garde movements:

All architecture that attempts to continue building on tradition – regardless of which tradition –, with the means presently available and according to the present needs is, in its very conception, doomed. (I, 3, 1918, 33)

These same two views are also found in van 't Hoff. An evolutionary approach is revealed in his 'Architecture and Its Development.' At the same time, though, he believed we '[must] tear ourselves loose from [...] the work of the dead.'²⁰

De Stijl architects clearly voiced their opinions in terms of progress, pleading for new technologies and procedures, for the new vocabulary of form that these made possible, for a larger-scale and more rational organization, and for standardization in construction. Their thoughts were in keeping with the nineteenth-century positivist belief in technological, social, and scientific progress.

Problems arise, however, the moment one tries to identify the specific nature of progress in De Stijl. First, there was the split that had already occurred between Wils and van 't Hoff in 1919, whereby it would be illogical to interpret their (limited) work solely within the context of De Stijl innovations. Oud, too, left De Stijl after a few years, following a difference of opinion with van Doesburg, which brought a fundamental question to light.²¹

They had agreed, in 1921, that van Doesburg would determine the color scheme for the municipal housing blocks that Oud had built in the Spangen neighborhood of Rotterdam. Initially, Oud greeted van Doesburg's daring plans enthusiastically. But, a short time later, he began to distance himself from the black rectangles and bright colors that were to appear on the façades, probably influenced by the skepticism of his clients. Van Doesburg, who, at the best of times, was not very tactful, reacted furiously about this conflict between De Stijl's theoretical ideals and the practical demands that reality evidently placed on architecture.

Oud had been the city architect for Rotterdam since 1918. According to him, he suffered from the limited freedom his clients granted him. Nonetheless, he was prepared to give serious consideration to the constraints imposed upon him. Years later, we still see traces of anger and disappointment about this (what van Doesburg perceived as) betrayal yet fully understandable opportunism. In 1925, he blamed the 'doubting architect Oud' for having converted to the 'Liberty-Wendingen' style (as in the cottage architecture of the 'Oud Mathenesse' in Rotterdam and the decorative-façade architecture of the Café De Unie).

[...] If one recalls the honest beginnings of this architect, one is amazed at how, through the wholesale small-merchant mentality, once-celebrated realism degenerates into the spirit of the traveling salesman.²²

Some of the designs classified as De Stijl were, of course, actually realized (in addition to interiors, in the first place the Rietveld-Schröder house from 1923/1924). But, over the years, the realization of projects became increasingly problematic. The result of the, in itself, fruitful collaboration between architect Cornelis van Eesteren and van Doesburg during the 1920s was thus mainly limited to building maquettes. Highly revealing was the attitude of Le Corbusier, who appeared unshaven and in his work clothes at the opening of the Rosenberg exhibition 'Les architectes du groupe de Stijl' in Paris in the autumn of 1923, because, according to him, he came directly from the building site. Le Corbusier didn't just design, he *built*.²³

It more or less goes without saying that those who resisted De Stijl – such as the supporters of the Amsterdam School and of the journal *Wendingen* – seldom saw this movement as making a contribution to modern architecture. The members of the Bauhaus in Weimar were equally skeptical. As part of his ceaseless efforts to enlist support, van Doesburg had tried to attract new members and establish affiliations with the Bauhaus between 1920 and 1923. Although several of the latter's members took courses from van Doesburg, doors remained closed to him – owing, above all, to his polemical proselytizing and his critique of the Bauhaus and Walter Gropius. By the end of the 1920s, the Dutch contribution to the advancement of architecture was attributed more to Oud and the 'New Architecture' of Benjamin Merkelbach, Johannes Duiker, and Lodewijk van der Vlugt than to De Stijl's largely theoretical activities.

Innovation in painting

The ideas of progress expressed in the movement's articles on painting are much less influenced by social developments than those expressed in its articles on architecture, an art form that is simply more difficult to discuss without reference to social, economic, and technological change. The different ideas of the artists and the architects on progress clearly reflected the distinction between the two groups. The social commitment of the still active architects Oud, Wils, and especially van 't Hoff, who built as well as designed, reveals an ongoing subliminal tension toward the approach of other De Stijl members.²⁴ In a socio-political sense, the De Stijl painters, especially Mondriaan and van Doesburg (the latter who was very busy with architecture but never actually built anything), distanced themselves from every ideology. Cap-

italism and Socialism were too 'materialistic' for them. It was continually emphasized that the aim of Neo-Plasticism in painting was, in the first place, 'spiritual growth.' And, while this growth – certainly where Mondrian was concerned – had Utopian features, it was never made clear how such a future Utopia could be achieved in reality.

In De Stijl's dialectical way of thinking, this growth implied at least an increasing distancing from the *natural*. In painting, this amounted to the figurative, the imitation of the (phenomenal) reality. But the concept also had a philosophical connotation, and a dual one at that: on the one hand, the 'material' (resulting from the common dichotomy between mind and body); on the other, in the sense of the Enlightenment's view of nature, which said that nature had to be controlled and subjugated. Mondrian thus approvingly quoted Voltaire, where the latter claimed that 'man perfects himself the more he distances himself from nature' (I, II, 1918, 127).

De Stijl sought an equilibrium between the 'inward' and the 'outward,' between the spiritual and the natural (the material), an initially individual process of development that slowly but surely leads to a universal harmony, and thus gives expression to the new spirit of the time. Mondrian talks of

a great heightening of subjectivity [...] in man (evolution) – in other words a growing, expanding consciousness. Subjectivity remains subjective, but it diminishes in the measure that objectivity (the universal) grows in the individual.

Subjectivity ceases to exist only when the mutationlike leap is made from subjectivity to objectivity, from individual existence to universal existence; but before this can happen there must be a difference in the degree of subjectivity.

This difference of degree is the cause of the differences on [sic] artistic expression and makes the new plastic the most direct aesthetic manifestation of the universal possible in a period that is still subjective.²⁵

Such statements reflect different ideas about development and progress: the Hegelian notion that human thought developed over time, as distilled by Bolland (consciousness, the dialectical relationship between the subjective and the objective); nineteenth-century evolutionary theory and reminiscences of neo-Platonic and Gnostic thought (difference in level of being, aesthetic revelation, expansion of consciousness); and the kind of amalgamation that also appears in Helena Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), although the Hegelian element in this, at the time, widely read theosophy is much more limited, or, if you like, hidden. These components of the notion of evolution demonstrate the comprehensive nature of Mondrian's Utopian idealism: in his view, it led to a totally new man and a totally new world.²⁶

Different notions of the history of painting can also be found in van Doesburg. In the sixth issue of the first volume of *De Stijl*, he included a passionate essay by a certain Miss Edith Pijpers, outlining a series of objections to modern visual art, that is, to *De Stijl*. He then proffered a defense in his own words, in which he responded in great detail to the issues raised. History has taught us, he wrote, that there is continual self-development of the spirit. This is another Hegelian-sounding expression. According to van Doesburg, this self-development brought with it innovations that engendered fear in many. But this fear, he continued in a nineteenth-century positivist tone, was none other than the fear of primitive man when faced with thunder and lightning, a fear that has been conquered thanks to science (I, 6, 1918, 67).

'The modern era has fallen apart and will fall apart more,' quotes van Doesburg from Miss Pijpers, before continuing enthusiastically:

Fortunately! It is not our era that is falling apart, but precisely the old era, the old culture, the pseudo-culture based on emotion, faith and nuance; *the old era that yielded an art with pseudo-light, pseudo-warmth (in painting, this warmth was seventy-five percent lapis lazuli, madder varnish, umber, burnt sienna), pseudo-depth, pseudo-sublimity, pseudo-profundity, and pseudo-sensitivity, a culture that as a result ends in one big scaffold.*

The forms of the old culture fall apart because the essence of a new culture is already intrinsically present in mankind. The revelation of this conflict is the world war we are presently experiencing. The new culture reveals itself through the few. They are the bearers of the new world, of the new era. Appearance is replaced by essence. Vagueness becomes definiteness. Nuance, color. Pseudo-space, space. Pseudo-depth, depth. Emotion, awareness. Passion, reason. War, justice. Nature, style. (I, 6, 1918, 68; emphasis in original)

Underlying this prophetic rhetoric, which in the end becomes a harping peroration, where we see the occasionally sloppily writing van Doesburg at his best, is again the idea of the spirit of the time, but here it is in a dynamic form, as a perpetual, or rather, forever advancing, spirit of the time that casts off old forms. However, it is better not to view the now-dated expressions of 'emotion, faith and nuance' as cultural-philosophical categories. Rather they should be seen in the first place as referring to the (by van Doesburg rejected) visual vocabulary of the Expressionist, Symbolist, and Impressionistic artists, in short, of those who were still working figuratively.

Van Doesburg's words are another outstanding example of the avant-gardist 'break' idiom that recurs repeatedly in *De Stijl*. Where, in the 'Introduction to Volume 2,' he speaks of an 'artistic development *by leaps*' that 'must result in a totally new means of expression,' in 'Manifesto I of "De Stijl," 1918' on the following page, it is formulated as follows:

1. *There is an old and there is a new consciousness of time.*

The old centers on the individual.

The new centers on the universal.

The struggle between individual and universal is manifested in the world war, as well as in contemporary art.

[...]

5. *This realization [of the new consciousness of time] is obstructed by tradition, dogma, and dominance by the individual (the natural).²⁷*

The signatories then called for all impediments to these new developments to be eliminated.

In his article 'The Death of Modernisms' (1925), van Doesburg emphasized even more clearly the 'break' character of De Stijl's artistic program. Here, he distances himself from 'the "modern" or the "avant-garde" (vanguard of the new).' Apparently, a place in the vanguard was not enough for him; he wanted to belong to the future. He initially aimed his arrows at Futurism, which by this time he despised, and which in Italy was associated with Fascism. But he also tried to distance himself from other innovative movements, for whom the 'break' rhetoric turned out to be the most appropriate:

Thus, besides 'the new,' there is also the deceptive fake: the quasi- or pseudo-new. In addition to the old, there is the 'old in a new form,' the modern. There is also a certain percentage of the new mentality in the 'modern,' even though it pertains only to form, but this percentage is so limited it can never increase to 100% = mutation, and suddenly and totally become 'new.' (VI, 9, 1925, 123)

What is new is totally different, and that frightens most people, like the Eskimo who, van Doesburg claims on the next page, when visiting the civilized world (London), caught a cold for the first time and wanted to return home immediately. (A true story! he added, to remove all doubts.)

Similar comments about the necessity of a break with tradition are found in Mondrian. In the fifth volume of *De Stijl*, he writes (on the page opposite a photograph of a diagonally hanging cable-lift, described only as the 'Kohlern cable-lift in Tirol'): 'one cannot built the new with old material' (V, 3, 1922, 47). And, in the last number of that same year, the following appears:

The old only causes damage insofar as it is an impediment to the new. [...] Do not forget we are at a turning point in culture, at the end of all the old: the separation of the two is absolute and definitive. (V, 12, 1922, 180-81, cf. VI, 6/7, 1924, 86-88; original in French)

Despite the regularly recurring accentuation of the 'break' character in the development of painting, the historical orientation promoted by the members of De Stijl in their journal nevertheless tends to reflect a kind of continuing process. In his 'The New Plastic in Painting' essay, which appeared in the first volume, Mondrian already refers to precursors of De Stijl who broke with the 'visual corporeality of objects in the painting,' namely Cézanne, van Gogh, and Cubists like Picasso. In the process that, in the end, resulted in 'the determination of color,' Cézanne's attempt to render form through color was a step in the right direction, as was Van Gogh's 'strong linear expression (contour).' With the Cubists, form and color became autonomous; they simply appeared, to use Mondrian's words, 'in their own right.' The *composition* that, in the end, would be expressed in the total abstraction of Neo-Plasticism thus came to the foreground (I, 4, 1918, 42-44).

This development has an inevitable character, argued Mondrian a few years later in 'Blown by the Wind' (literally, in Dutch, 'The Cloak to the Wind,' published in *De Stijl* in 1924), a piece in which he protested against the slackening off of many of his fellow-innovators. It is a fact, he assures us

that evolution does exist in art: that it is development and not regression. Abstract art, which evolved out of naturalistic art, cannot possibly return to its starting point.

Abstract art can evolve only by consistent development. In this way it can arrive at the purely plastic, which Neo-Plasticism has attained. (VI, 6/7, 1924, 88)

Vilmos Huszár also points to the inevitable nature of the development propagated by De Stijl. In one installment of his serial essay 'Aesthetical Exposition,' in which he compares a monumental work by van der Leek with a – in his view – outdated painting by R.N. Roland Holst, he reviles a number of contemporary developments:

All this will disappear as quickly as it appeared. Experience has taught us this: the Wiener Secession, the Jugendstil, the Amsterdam School, etc. Apart, of course, from the powerful figures of these movements, because they do not stand outside the logical development of our monumental stylistic growth [...].

[We] are further along now, the Futurists and Cubists have cleared away a lot despite opposition and impediments. In the end the opposition will lose out, because development will continue to run its course. (I, 7, 1918, 80, 84)

In the same article (published in the early years of a highly successful period of the Amsterdam School), Huszár, like Mondrian, appeals to direct predecessors. The 'soon-to-be groundbreaking architectural painting' follows a line of

development that runs ‘through Impressionism to Pointillism and Futurism, via Cubism to Neo-Plasticism’ (I, 7, 1918, 80, 84).

In one of the not always equally well-formulated contributions by Futurist and ‘scientific Cubist’ Gino Severini, a similar recent history is modeled as a pre-history. It begins with Mallarmé’s Symbolism, and runs via the Impressionists, who, however, never managed to ‘achieve the same evolution in form’ as they had in color. Yet the Impressionists were still ‘pioneers,’ because they cast aside the religious, the allegorical, and the mystical. In the end, Severini claims, we come to the diverse forms of Cubism – Braque’s, Picasso’s, and his own (II, 3, 1919, 25-27).

In van Doesburg’s view, Cubism then was apparently close enough to what De Stijl sought, although his desire to connect with the foreign avant-garde probably made him more receptive than usual toward Severini. For the sake of clarity, he qualified a remark made by the latter with a note about the mutual influence of different surfaces that had arisen by then, namely, ‘expressed “in the artistic way” for the first time in “Neo-Plasticism.” Ed.’ (II, 3, 1919, 26, note 2).

A few years later, van Doesburg was noticeably less generous in his praise of the, by then, reasonably successful, albeit artistically waning, Cubism. In ‘The Cubist Problem, its Principles and its Consequences’ (a reaction to two studies on Cubism by Daniel Henry and Maurice Raynal, respectively), his reservations concerned, in the first place, the fact the Neo-Plasticism had not been acknowledged as the next (and, in the meantime, already taken) step.²⁸ Neither Raynal nor Henry, for example, had

the courage, the need to acknowledge a [...] totally new means of expression as a consequence of the Cubist problem. (IV, 10, 1921, 145)

Van Doesburg began by disqualifying both writers as outsiders because they were not painters. After another comment about the ‘boxer-like mentality’ of their critiques, he then attacked the content of their work. In the subsequent analysis, he seemed to view Cubism repeatedly as an intermediate stage. Henry, for example, underestimates Cubism’s major contribution to breaking through form; instead, he emphasizes the three-dimensional nature of Cubist works and opposes abstractionist tendencies, denouncing them as decorative art. Erroneously, both Henry and Raynal see nothing of the ‘formless rendering of color’ first observed in Cubism but only achieved later. Both ‘think of art not in terms of its development but in terms of its traditional manifestation’ (IV, 10, 1921, 148).

The ‘ongoing evolution of the human spirit’ expressed by Neo-Plasticism was, in terms of development, ‘as necessary as it was healthy’ (IV, 10, 1921, 149). It had left Cubism behind. But who acknowledged this? Nearly all of the

modern art journals in France, Germany, and Italy (the more traditional England never counted for van Doesburg) suffered from what is here so characteristically called 'a reluctance to face the consequences' (IV, 12, 1921, 174).

Van Doesburg was interested in and needed a developmental perspective. As such, with respect to 'post- and neo-Impressionism,' he emphasized the intuitive abolition of 'form as organic unity,' and explained Picasso's and Braque's use of letters and digits as a cautious attempt at abstraction. It therefore follows that van Doesburg was unimpressed by Henry's interpretation, in which the viewer of a Cubist work reconstructs the 'form scheme' into a thing or object. (As with the recent 'kaleidoscopic-naturalistic' work of van der Leek, here, too, he scoffs, in a parenthetical remark, at his former collaborator; IV, 4, 12, 1921, 174-75).

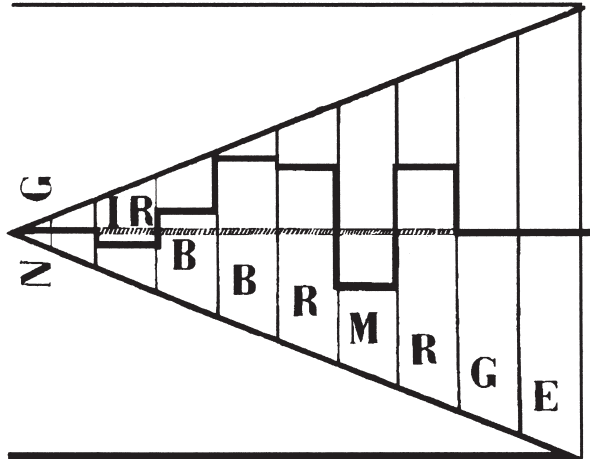
In *De Stijl* of the following year, van Doesburg returns explicitly to the concept of development, this time not only with respect to recent movements, but in a broader context, as Wils had attempted earlier in his developmental scheme for symmetry. '*Der Wille zum Stil*' (The Will To Style), the text of a lecture van Doesburg gave earlier in Jena, Weimar, and Berlin, offers a model of development that attempts to describe the history of culture from the ancient Egyptians up to the present-day Neo-Plasticism.²⁹

The title of the lecture is reminiscent of Nietzsche's *Der Wille zur Macht* (*The Will to Power*). It seems that the sometimes impressionable van Doesburg read Nietzsche in those days. But Nietzsche's influence appears to have been limited, judging by the following sentence:

The tragic in art is the psychological expression of an imperfect, desperate human being who believes that the great Opposites, which he primitively understands to be the Here-and-Now and Beyond (...), Good and Evil, cannot be brought into harmony with each other. (V, 2, 1922, 28)

Van Doesburg did more than just echo book titles, however. Inspired by the radicalness and dynamism of Nietzsche's philosophy, he gave to cultural evolution the – for Nietzsche so important and metaphysically loaded – concept of 'struggle.' The driving force behind evolution is 'the Will to Overcome Nature' ('*der Wille zur Überwindung der Natur*'), van Doesburg's explosive mixture of Nietzsche's *Will to Power* and the Enlightenment's desire for total control over nature. Such a metaphysical intuition makes a more dynamic impression than do merely discursive Hegelian notions, such as 'the self-development of the spirit.'³⁰

In '*Der Wille zum Stil*,' van Doesburg presents a rather odd but, in terms of his views, nonetheless illuminating scheme for the 'spiritual growth of mankind in the Universe,' to use Huszár's earlier-cited words. The unusual scheme is difficult to understand, however, without reference to concrete works of art from the periods concerned.



Mit den zwei wagerechten Linien seien die Polarität Natur (oben), -Geist (unten), das „Äußerste Eine“ und das „Äußerste Andere“ dargestellt. Aus der allmählichen Ausgleichung dieser zwei Kräfte ergibt sich das Dreieck, welches die kulturellen Entwicklungstypen von der Zeit der Ägypter bis zur Neuzeit umfaßt. Die Buchstaben bedeuten also — von rechts nach links — E = Ägypter, G = Griechen, R = Romanen, M = Mittelalter, R = Renaissance, B = Barock, B = Biedermeier, IR = Idealismus-Reformation, NG = Neue Gestaltung, die jetzt beginnende Epoche. Die schraffierte mittlere Linie stellt das Mittel dar, die absolute Einheit der „Zweiheit“ Natur-Geist. (Durchgehende Evolution.)

The two horizontal lines represent the Nature pole (above), the Spirit pole (below), the 'Extreme One' and the 'Extreme Other.' From the gradually achieved balance between these two powers, the triangle results that encompasses the types of cultural development, from the era of the Egyptians up to now. Moving from right to left, the capital letters refer to: E = Egyptians, G = Greeks, R = Romans, M = Middle Ages, R = Renaissance, B = Baroque, B = Biedermeier, IR = Idealism/Reformation, NG = Neue Gestaltung (Neo-Plasticism), the era now beginning. The shaded middle line indicates the average, the absolute Unity of the nature-spirit 'duality' (continuing evolution).

This diagram may appear confusing at first (the time scale moves from right to left; NG is not *Natur/Geist*, but *Neue Gestaltung*, i.e. Neo-Plasticism, etc.). But van Doesburg's commentary quickly clarifies the intention. The triangle represents the gradual attainment of an equilibrium between the natural pole (above) and the spiritual pole (below). The corner of the triangle suggests that a total harmony in the synthesis of the natural and the spiritual has been achieved with the coming of De Stijl, although only a few lines earlier, van Doesburg had explicitly stated: 'Never and nowhere does this end. It continues forever' (V, 2, 1922, 25).

The dark line indicates 'in which polar constellation the artistic-cultural life of every era takes place.' In the culture and art of the ancient Egyptians (which van Doesburg seems to have envisaged as monumental and half abstract) and Greeks, there is what can be called a unity of the spiritual and the natural, to the extent that was possible in this early stage of cultural evolution. In this diagram, the Romans lean too far into the natural (the realistic), whereas in the Middle Ages an excess of spirituality manifests itself.

In the development described by van Doesburg, not only does this opposition between a more or less realistic representation of reality play a role, so too does pictorial perspective. Van Doesburg cites Rembrandt's sharp contrasts between light and dark, in which the colored figures depicted are subordinated to the painterly composition. He continues this line through to the Impressionists: in Manet, the contrasts between light and dark have become contrasts between the colors themselves. The next step is taken by van Gogh, already mentioned earlier by Mondrian, after which natural representation is further unraveled by van der Leek and Picasso.

Another surprising feature of the diagram is the high 'natural content' of the Baroque, but van Doesburg probably did not include Rembrandt in this style. The corner of the triangle raises other problems: nowhere is it explained what is meant by either 'Biedermeier' or 'Idealism/Reformation,' although the latter probably refers to all the recent movements and artists who were seeking the 'spiritual in art' (Impressionism, Futurism, Cubism; Manet, Cézanne, van Gogh, Picasso, Braque, Kandinsky).

Finally, in this strange apex, the seed of a solution to what van Doesburg calls the 'time problem,' germinates: the difficulty of representing succession. In Rousseau (*Le Douanier*) and van der Leek, among others, we see how, through the repetition of motifs, the 'painterly sense of time' can be expressed in a so-called 'mechanization of visual fields' (V, 2, 1922, 32).

According to van Doesburg, the *mechanical*, the synthesis of the static and the dynamic, was appropriate to the new style, now that artistic and technological developments were beginning to coincide. The development of the primitive stone drill into a perfectly working machine and of drawings from the Stone Age into the present-day elementary artwork were not only coincid-

ing, they were also beginning to merge. Whereas craftsmanship and the individual were progressively aging, both developments culminated in methods of machine production and a 'mechanical aesthetics.' The new style, van Doesburg claimed, in a rather religious or, perhaps, Nietzschean tone, would be a style of redemption and vital calm (V, 3, 1922, 33ff.).

Consistent development

By now, the extent to which the changes sought by De Stijl in architecture and painting were understood in terms of progress will be abundantly clear, although words like 'evolution,' 'growth (of consciousness),' and, especially, 'development' were the ones most readily used. In the first place, arguments repeatedly appealed to the spirit of the time, an approach also popular in academic art history at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Historical interpretations that presuppose a spirit of the time are equally reconcilable with notions of decline or cyclicity. In the case of De Stijl, however, the concept of the spirit of the time was always about continual development. 'We speak of *trends* and *turning points* in art,' grumbles Mondrian, in this context, 'but its evolution is emphatically denied' (I, 8, 1918, 90, note 1). The importance of the concept of the spirit of the time lay in the historical-metaphysical dimension that could be extended to (one's own) history. In essence, a new era had dawned: whoever could not see that would live increasingly in a dream world that had irrevocably passed, that had been *essentially* done away with.

This metaphysical approach to history repeatedly led to the assumption of inevitable development in art. A more or less explicit appeal was then made to ideas originating from either the theory of evolution, the Hegelian legacy, or a positivist theory of history. These three types of argumentation, which (as described earlier) took shape during the nineteenth century, continually overlap in *De Stijl*, even where outside contributors are concerned.

The same occurs with respect to the alternation between an idiom in which gradual development is foremost, and the jargon of the 'break,' an ambivalence that appears repeatedly in the avant-garde. Underlying this were the same types of arguments, whereby the 'break' was understood, in an evolutionary context, as 'mutation,' and defended in the dialectical line of reasoning as the antithesis. A positivist justification for the 'break' thought is not found in *De Stijl*, nor can one imagine it there, for, in Comtean positivism, one speaks at most of a 'temporary cessation.'

Development and progress in art also appear repeatedly in *De Stijl* as inseparable constituent processes of either a universal social progress (especially in architecture) or a more general, speculative cultural development, a

universal 'spiritual growth.' Conversely, however, the avant-gardist idea of 'vanguard' also occurs, according to which De Stijl did not form part of such a development but rather preceded it and led the way, as was the case when van Doesburg's resisted Cubism.

The influence of Hegelian developmental thought on the De Stijl theorists brought with it a problem that Peter Bürger has already identified in avant-garde movements.³¹ The finalism of this thought was, in fact, at odds with the unlimited advance, also in the future, of desirable developments, and it affected the status of art itself. This can be seen repeatedly in De Stijl. Not in the architects of the first hour (because architects want to continue building, even though van 't Hoff stopped doing so), but particularly in the more theoretically minded representatives, like van Doesburg and Mondrian.

The 'consistent development' of evolution would eventually leave art itself behind. In 'The Realization of Neo-Plasticism in the Distant Future and in Architecture Today,' which appeared in the March and May 1922 issues of *De Stijl*, Mondrian observes that this process was already taking place. Architecture becomes 'construction,' the decorative arts are absorbed into machine production,

'theater' is displaced by the cinema and the music hall; 'music' by dance music and the phonograph; 'painting' by film, photography, reproductions, and so on. 'Literature' by its very nature is already largely 'practical,' as in science, journalism, etc., and is becoming more so with time; as 'poetry,' it is increasingly ridiculous. In spite of all, the arts continue and seek renewal. But the way to renewal is also their destruction. To evolve is to break with tradition – 'art' (in the traditional sense) is in the process of progressive dissolution: as is already evident in painting (in Neo-Plasticism). (V, 3, 1922, 41)

This formulation still allowed for the continuation of non-traditional art, an ambiguity that recurs continually in this context. On the one hand, Mondrian believed art had done its work if the harmony of a full life was achieved, if 'the domination of the tragic in life [was] ended' and 'the movement of life itself [became] harmonious.' On the other hand, he adds immediately, this does not lead to ossification because 'intensification' is always possible and is even a prerequisite for 'beauty' (V, 3, 1922, 43-44).

Van Doesburg, as always, was more radical. In the next volume, three and a half years later (by this time, van Doesburg was navigating through so many European art movements that he seems to have had little time left for the regular production of *De Stijl*), he published a manifesto bearing the Hegelian title 'The End of Art.'³² This essay is permeated by the avant-garde's anti-aesthetic ideal, the desire to bridge the gap between art and life. Art is a Renaissance invention, writes van Doesburg here, which in essence is not renew-

able. Progress concerns 'the whole of one's life,' and that makes the by-now so-exclusive phenomenon of art impossible. Second, art today is an impediment for 'the development of real life.' Art has poisoned life:

Postcards, Stamps, Tobacco Pouches, Train Tickets, Chamber Pots, Umbrellas, Towels, Pyjamas, Chairs, Bed Covers, Handkerchiefs, Ties, everything has been artfified. Let us refresh ourselves with those things that are not art. The bathroom, the bathtub, the bicycle, the automobile, an engine room, an iron.

There are people who can make beautiful things without art.

These are the innovators. (VI, 9, 1925, 136)

Given the great influence that De Stijl later had on design, this excerpt may seem odd. But van Doesburg was, of course, denouncing a different type of design, that of decoration and ornament. Odder still is the fact that in the years that followed, he practiced a totally different idea of art. As stated earlier, he propagated a new style known as 'Elementarism,' which he presented in terms of progress, as a new development, a new stage in art (VII, 75/76, 1926-1927, 38-39).

All in all, van Doesburg's ideas about 'consistent development' come across much more as non-finalistic, as unlimited progress, than Mondrian's, certainly where painting is concerned. While there are some traces of artistic development in Mondrian's later work, these pale in the face of the extensive innovation in van Doesburg. This perspective also casts a different light on the drifting apart of Mondrian and van Doesburg.

Today, it is widely acknowledged that this was not merely the result of disagreement about the permissibility of the diagonal and of non-primary colors. Van Doesburg's conviction – not only as an artist but also as the theorist and instigator of the movement – that a forever progressing development and renewal were essential, resulted in changes that must have increasingly formed a problem for Mondrian, who was more firmly principled in both his work and thought. For Mondrian, Neo-Plasticism was the culmination of a centuries-long development, an – or even *the* – endpoint of evolution in art.

This opposition between van Doesburg and Mondrian was not new. It had already been voiced in a letter that van Doesburg sent to Oud on 24 June 1919. Following a discussion between Mondrian and himself, he wrote:

I defended the notion that we were a stepping stone – as Cézanne led to us, so we lead to something else. Everything is en mouvement perpétuel! Mondrian really is a dogmatist.³³

The artistic revolution of De Stijl

Together with the first question posed in this chapter, the second has now largely been answered, namely, to what extent De Stijl utilized the rhetoric of progress. However, it is revealing to examine this usage more closely still, along with the question of to what degree we can speak of an artistic revolution where De Stijl is concerned.

Firstly, the construction of a unique *pre-history* by an innovative movement as mentioned in earlier chapters has already been discussed with respect to both architecture and painting. The advantage of such a reconstruction is evident: historical developments in art gain a convincingly logical and inevitable character. Whoever fails to acknowledge the importance of the advocated changes denies the course of history. To cite one last example: in the third volume of *De Stijl*, van Doesburg favorably reviews a book by French-German writer Iwan Goll, in which the latter posits a line of development from Diderot, via Cézanne, to Mallarmé. When Goll begins to discuss Picasso, van Doesburg quotes him approvingly where he states that French art '[has] broken new ground. The line continues via Picasso [...],' after which he interrupts Goll with

*(Exactly! Doesn't Iwan Goll know Piet Mondrian's work?) to Neo-Plasticism, to De Stijl.*³⁴

As stated earlier, the construction of a unique pre-history implies a historical structure based on continuity that is at odds with the 'break' rhetoric. That rhetoric generally goes hand in hand with *revolutionary terminology*, in which a well-defined *group* claims and forces the revolution concerned.

Such terminology is amply characterized in the preceding text, but one additional element deserves to be highlighted, namely the articulation of a feeling of impasse and confusion. Such a feeling manifests itself implicitly, of course, in the diverse theories (and slogans) that are advanced by way of justification. It becomes even clearer with respect to the historical situating of De Stijl, both in the sense mentioned earlier (of situating it within a specific historical model), and in the continual search for supporters and opponents in a rapidly changing, complex power play among innovative movements. The impasse experienced in art, however, is expressed much more directly.

In this area, van Doesburg was in his element. In response to an inaugural address given by the Dutch artist R.N. Roland Holst (so often maligned in *De Stijl*) at the Rijksacademie van Beeldende Kunst (National Academy of the Visual Arts), van Doesburg outlines, for example, the climate in which something as terrible as Roland Holst's appointment could take place:

Before the decomposition of a culture begins, there is a (usually brief) period of effeteness. The female element dominates. The gesture becomes theatrical. The pathos phony. The sentimentality and the whining assume vague, indistinct forms. In painting, form and color perish. Form melts into a whimsical play of slack lines; color is demoted to gray. And, in this vagueness, even the characteristic features of that era are lost, where those false values of a complacent and bourgeois culture, based on a spiritually crippling succession of disorders, still have some meaning. (II, 9, 1919, 103)

This vocabulary continues in the next part of the text: make-up, theft, fraud, plundering of the past, scrounging, and arrogant attitude are some of the invectives that follow.

Such noises are also frequently heard from the architects: from Oud, for instance, in his earlier cited tirade against the Marxists; from Wils, who bitterly observed that the decoration of houses was the same as in the 'era of Louis XVI'; and from van 't Hoff who, when describing the impasse in Dutch architecture, remarked that it had missed the 'evolution that, for example, modern transportation had undergone' – technology was neglected, building materials were inferior, renewal in existing cities was ruled out, and so on (I, 5, 1918, 57-59).

Rather than exploiting the countless opportunities that these new technologies and procedures had to offer, disorientation and lethargy prevailed. The De Stijl movement observed confusion and stagnation, if not decline. Occasionally, this was even noted triumphantly, because the impasse was the springboard to the new. 'Europe is lost,' it was called, in 'Manifesto III: Toward a New Image of the World':

We look on calmly. Even if we were able to help, we would not. We do not wish to prolong the life of this old prostitute.

A new Europe has already begun to grow in us. (IV, 8, 1921, 126)

This is the revolutionary jargon through which the pathos of the *Communist Manifesto* reverberates, a sound that echoed through many avant-gardist pamphlets. But the slogans used by De Stijl were not entirely idle, because, at least where painting was concerned, van Doesburg managed to describe the nature of the artistic revolution rather well: it lay in the Cubist problem of how natural representation should be rendered in terms of the plane, the 'primary element of representation.' He characterized such attempts as 'the revolutionary stage, the critical moment *par excellence*, of painting' (IV, 12, 1921, 175).

During artistic upheaval, the utilization of revolutionary terminology and the steadfast belief in the realization of new values can almost only be achieved in a more or less closed community. Although there was little social

cohesiveness within De Stijl (initially most of the contacts went through van Doesburg, as did the journal itself), the formation of strategic groups often occurred. De Stijl was determined to be acknowledged as the exclusive leader of developments in art throughout the world. It thus struggled to rally support at home and abroad, and presented itself not only by resisting well-established traditions but also by trying to squeeze the life out of rival innovative moments.

This was evident, for example, in its aggressive tone toward the Amsterdam School and its mouthpiece, the journal *Wendingen*.³⁵ It also manifested itself in the way van Doesburg gradually began to oppose Cubism and Futurism as well as the deceptive imitation of the quasi- and pseudo-new (as quoted above). In fact, De Stijl implicitly played with the argumentation of what was *essentially* modern. In Mondrian's article 'Blown by the Wind,' he thus disparaged those among the avant-garde who only participated in the margins without drawing radical conclusions from the new era, the '*traitorous attitude of those who pioneered the new*' (VI, 6/7, 1924, 87).

In this, Mondrian opposed, among others, a group of Parisian Cubists, including Picasso and Severini, who by this time had returned to making figurative work. Van Doesburg, too, became involved in the dispute. In the fifth volume of *De Stijl*, he discusses a number of foreign, 'so-called modern art periodicals,' in which he finds 'important, reactionary articles.' Once the defenders of abstraction, these periodicals had now sold out to the 'art trade' and were reverting to 'naturalism.'³⁶ Following van Doesburg's unsuccessful attempts to establish links with the Bauhaus, after which any form of cooperation with De Stijl became impossible, this institution was also unmasked:

Just as the church is a parody of Christianity, so Gropius's Bauhaus in Weimar is a parody of the New Plasticism. [...] Both a lack and a denial of a basic sense of imaging made [...] the new form of artistic expression degenerate into a kind of ultra-baroque. (V, 5, 1922, 72)

Van Doesburg was outraged when 'traitors' emerged within the ranks of De Stijl. We have already seen how he reviled the 'traveling salesman' Oud, and how he lashed out at van der Leek. He became livid when Wils and Huszár collaborated on another periodical (*Levende Kunst*), and when he discovered some years later, after the Weimar fiasco, that Rietveld had been named as a contributor to a Bauhaus exhibition.³⁷ One final illustration is his reaction to the authoritative Dutch architecture critic Huib Hoste, who published an article on architecture in *De Stijl* but elsewhere appeared disloyal to the movement's principles. Hoste, it turns out, published in that same month a favorable review of the work of visual artist Henriëtte Willebeek Le Mair in the local weekly, the *Nieuwe Amsterdammer* (29 July 1918): in van Doesburg's eyes,

there was no mercy for the misuse of De Stijl terminology and the lauding of 'supple' curved lines. One could not serve two masters at once, he stated later, in response to Hoste's defense: baroque or modern, 'but, please, no modern-Baroque.'³⁸

Along with this polarization, and the formation of different groups within De Stijl, there was also the construction of a unique recent history of the movement, which was in agreement with the already constructed pre-history, and was presented as clearly as possible. Van Doesburg, in particular, was pre-occupied with this. The jubilee issue *10 Jaren Stijl*, celebrating the movement's activities over the previous decade, is a good example of a survey in which an artist acts as a historian of his own day. (Van Doesburg nonetheless had a strong personal influence on this number. Oud wrote to him saying the only thing missing was that van Doesburg had 'failed to take credit for the first trans-Atlantic flight and for ending the war.'³⁹)

Significant in this issue is De Stijl's objectively presented success, in the form of a long list of 'principal collaborators' of the preceding decade and a diagram depicting the 'Degree of Influence of De Stijl Movement Abroad Since 1917.' (What was probably meant was the number of years during which van Doesburg had cultivated a specific contact in a particular country; by that time, according to his estimation, he had links with 25 countries.) Also included is a graph indicating the 'Line of Development 1917-1921.' The y-axis indicates the year, while the x-axis is unmarked. Whatever else it may mean, though, the line rises sharply, so that it is clear there is 'development' (VII, 79/84, 1927, 59-62).

The historicizing glance that van Doesburg casts over his shoulder – the ambivalent consciousness of being both an actor and a spectator, both a resident and a transient (to reiterate Susan Sontag's previously cited words) – occasionally created problems. This is evident in the design Oud made for 'De Vonk' in 1917, a vacation residence for working-class women completed in 1919. (Van Doesburg designed the interior of the downstairs hall, the stairway, and the upstairs hall.) 'De Vonk' had a rather traditional appearance, with its pitched roofs, brick exterior, and roofing tiles. This bothered van Doesburg, who, a month after it was opened, suggested to Oud that he pre-date his design to 1916, and that a note be added to say he no longer stood behind it, 'any more than Mondrian and van Doesburg would fully stand behind their work from that time.'⁴⁰ For similar reasons, van Doesburg revised a design for an interior that he had executed for Dutch pacifist and theologian Bart de Ligt in 1919. It was published in *De Stijl* (III, 12, 1920) in black-and-white, with other colors being mentioned, then printed in primary colors elsewhere a few years later because this was better for the De Stijl image.⁴¹ Apparently, the movement's history had to reflect an unambiguous and orderly character: progress does not march forward in shabby suits.

De Stijl and posterity

By now, there will be little doubt that De Stijl did its best to give itself an important place in history. But was it, then, eventually granted that place? And if it was the locus of far-reaching innovations, as Friedman claims, how did this come about? Does art history, in its perpetual historical surveys, continue to view De Stijl's innovations as the great leap forward that the protagonists of this movement believed they had made?

The latter is not necessarily true, and for this reason it is important to put Friedman's tribute in perspective. In most art history anthologies, Mondrian and Rietveld are assigned prominent places, but this is always in a broader, international context, seen at the time by De Stijl as subordinate to its own interests. Whereas this movement considered itself a focal point, and foreign innovation as an – accurate or not – reflection of its activities, precisely the opposite occurred in the art history canon.

In Nikolaus Pevsner's 1936 *Pioneers of Modern Design*, an often republished (and revised) historical survey of architecture, the movement runs 'from William Morris to Walter Gropius,' as the sub-title meaningfully announces. In this, now frequently voiced perspective, Gropius represents a link that is both the culmination of a development and, at the same time, the starting point of twentieth-century architecture; that is, a focal point of sweeping changes that De Stijl's architecture relegated to mere scribbles in the margin. In retrospect, it can be said that van Doesburg, in his often consciously strategic struggle to obtain a place in history, placed his bet on the wrong horse by not compromising with Gropius during his stay at Weimar. Consequently, the Rietveld-Schröder house in Utrecht was presented as a more or less solitary illustration within the international current of architectonic innovation.

It is true that *Pioneers of Modern Design* does not go beyond the beginning of the First World War, by which time several of Gropius's projects had been realized but none of De Stijl's. But nor do Pevsner's much later authoritative works – *A History of Building Types* and *An Outline of European Architecture* – pay any attention to De Stijl. The same applies to Leonardo Benevolo's *Storia dell'architettura moderna (Story of Modern Architecture)*, a much-translated history of architecture that broadened its scope to include contemporary Dutch architecture.⁴²

The marginal place assigned to De Stijl in architectural histories is partially attributable to the unstable nature of the movement, to the sudden departure of van 't Hoff, Wils, Huszár, and, especially, Oud, and, additionally, to the very different character of van Doesburg's later work (the interior of Café Aubette in Strasbourg, executed together with Hans Arp and Sophie Täuber Arp). More than anything else, though, the limited number of realized projects was detrimental to the importance and reputation of the movement; specimens of actually completed architecture have generally proved to have a much greater impact than just drawings or texts.

To aggravate matters, during the course of the 1920s a somewhat related movement in Dutch architecture arose that did actually build, was less dogmatic, and had more international contacts. Among the architects of this movement were Mart Stam, Benjamin Merkelbach, Johannes Duiker, and, last but not least, J.J.P. Oud. Following the merging of the functionalist group 'De 8' with the architects of 'De Opbouw' in 1928, this New Realism became part of the so-called 'International Style,' a worldwide functionalism that would affect the character of architecture extensively and enduringly.

According to art historians, however, the ideas of De Stijl did influence these developments, not only where Dutch architects were concerned, but also, indirectly, abroad, in the work of Le Corbusier and, not least, the Bauhaus (Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and others). This influence was, however, diffuse and often indirect.⁴³ In the history of a relentlessly advancing architecture, De Stijl *as a movement* seems to have missed the boat. Nonetheless, the canon of twentieth-century architectural history is continually undergoing radical change, and Functionalism is losing ground. This restructuring of the past also has consequences for De Stijl. Frampton's *Modern Architecture*, for example, devotes a chapter to Neo-Plasticism, and Overy no longer sounds highly rhetorical when he claims that De Stijl forms a link between

*the pre-1914 avant-garde of Cubism and Futurism and the post-1918 modernism of [...] International Style architecture.*⁴⁴

Because De Stijl was not accepted readily in its day, however, a reevaluation of De Stijl architecture will likely be no easy task.

This is even truer for painting, where there is a much more limited shift in favor of De Stijl in the canon. International interest, on the other hand, has grown. The 1982 exhibitions and the related publications are both a reflection and a cause of this.

The most frequently consulted art history surveys grant Mondrian – but not De Stijl – an important place. Mondrian's position is undoubtedly related to the quick acceptance of his work in America (American visual arts set the tone after the Second World War), although, with such an observation, it would be strange to completely ignore the intrinsic qualities of his work and the extreme impression it must have made in its own day. Painters like van der Leek, Huszár, van Doesburg, and (the Dutchman) César Domela occupy a very modest place in handbooks and museums, in the wake of the battleship Mondrian.

The situation is slightly different in the case of the art-history surveys of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that began to appear in the early 1950s. In books like those of Werner Haftmann, Norbert Lynton, and

H. Arnason, *De Stijl*, as a movement with a program, began to play a more prominent role, and not only because those books allowed relatively more room for details.⁴⁵

Whoever wishes to consider this siting in terms of achievements or contributions to history (which is what art-history surveys always do and is what is expected of such an orderly evaluation of the past) must view Mondrian and *De Stijl* primarily within the international context of the emergence of abstract art between 1905 and 1920. It quickly becomes apparent that even before *De Stijl*'s first abstract works, such diverse artists as Kandinsky, Picabia, Braque, Picasso, Gris, Léger, Villon, Malevitch, and Duchamp had already abandoned, albeit often temporarily, what Mondrian and his followers called 'Neo-Plasticism.' Naturally, there are enormous differences between these artists, certainly in retrospect, because we now know their later works. But these differences were already very clear in the 1920s. Kandinsky's sensitive, expressionistic passion was diametrically opposed to *De Stijl*'s fulminations against the value of feeling. The preservation of a certain mimetic quality in Picasso and Léger's work had little to do with Neo-Plasticism, in which every direct reference to the 'natural' was forbidden. And the conceptual revolution engendered by Marcel Duchamp, after his initially Cubist beginnings, differed in every respect from *De Stijl*'s pursuit of the 'spiritual.'

However fascinating it may still be that such a large number of artists were able, in such a short time, to bring about – albeit largely independently of one another – an upheaval that, with hindsight, was so cohesive, the differences between them were and still are enormous. And the differences are more interesting than the similarities here, because the fact that *De Stijl* contributed to this upheaval is in itself hardly a shocking observation. The key question is how did it do this and in what areas. Jaffé's reply does not suffice here. His opinion, cited earlier in this chapter, that *De Stijl* could be a guiding light for humanity, is too closely allied to *De Stijl*'s own perspective. While Jaffé has written a survey of *De Stijl*'s philosophy and artistic creed that is as original as it is enthusiastic, he identifies with *De Stijl* so closely that in the final pages of his book, he characterizes its program and its work as a still (in 1956) valid plea for a better future for mankind.⁴⁶

Nearly all the later monographs and writings on *De Stijl* and its protagonists adopt a much more distant stance than Jaffé's. The question regarding the *importance* of *De Stijl*'s innovation is seldom considered anymore. In its interpretations of the movement, art-historical literature is gradually focusing almost exclusively on local descriptions and problems of detail.

So – to pose the perilous question yet again – of what did *De Stijl*'s innovation consist? Any reply to this question remains, of course, highly speculative. I shall, however, risk an attempt. First, the work of Neo-Plasticism has influenced our manner of perception and thereby enriched our schemes (and

thus our knowledge) of perception. The new techniques and procedures – monumental work without depth, primary colors, orthogonal principles, a new form of harmony that avoids symmetry, in short, De Stijl's totally distinct visual vocabulary has contributed to a richer and more diversified perception as well as to a wider range of artistic possibilities. This visual vocabulary, which distanced itself from the depiction or representation of both the – or a – reality, and feelings or moods, makes spatial relationships and references visible in an articulated way, that is, as relationship and reference.

As with architecture, De Stijl's artistic contribution can be illustrated by referring to the influence it had on the visual artists. Janson, for example, points to the links between Mondrian's and Roy Lichtenstein's work, as well as to Mondrian's influence on Op Art, while Lucie-Smith refers to Mondrian's effect on Kenneth Noland, J.R. Soto, and David Smith.⁴⁷ In 'Echoes of De Stijl,' Martin Friedman examines in detail the impact of especially Gerrit Rietveld on Donald Judd and Sol Le Witt, then goes on to discuss De Stijl's (especially Mondrian's) continued effect on Frank Stella, Jan Dibbets, and various Pop Art artists such as Segal and Lichtenstein.⁴⁸ Lesser known movements such as the one around Dutch artist Joost Baljeu and the journal *Structure* (1958-1964), which explicitly built on De Stijl's work, are also worth mentioning.

Such links are frequently made. Barnett Newman's work would be difficult to imagine without the tradition that preceded it, in which Mondrian played a role – even though that role was partially negative, because Newman explicitly opposed Mondrian, as in his *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue?* This ambivalence can be interpreted in different ways. First, biographically and sociologically, by trying to find out where and when Newman became familiar with Mondrian's work, whether he made his response known, whether he admired Mondrian and possibly other related painters, and so on. The speculative links made by art historians working along these lines sometimes assume a dubious character. For example, was Edward Hopper, when he painted his famous *Early Sunday Morning*, 'not unaware of Mondrian,' as Janson puts it? The painting dates from 1930, and anyone who knows that Hopper was not in Europe again after 1910 (where he was deeply impressed by the Impressionists) becomes suspicious. Of course, one cannot be sure he did not see Mondrian's work, or reproductions of it, but one thing we do know is that later, Hopper was averse to anyone who fawned on the abstract qualities of his paintings. When a friend once told him he had compared his work to Mondrian's in a lecture, Hopper is said to have replied: 'You kill me.'⁴⁹

A solely empirical-historical and sociological approach to art history, however, quickly leads to a historicism in which broader links are avoided. Museum directors, the public, and artists all appear to have an ongoing, hidden need for a different, more intrinsic approach, for a canon with a coherent

history that inevitably implies talking in terms of specific developments and value judgments. Although a statement such as Overy's cited above is speculative, it needn't also necessarily be invalid. By the same token, Jaffé's appraisal of De Stijl may be outdated in its ideological conception, but its attempt to give De Stijl a place in history needn't be disqualified as a result, no matter how much more recent art history (and other histories) prefers to focus on specific, well-defined moments and details.

For anyone who recalls Clement Greenberg's postwar critique of Picasso (in which he accused the painter of ignoring total abstraction), or who remembers the discussions in America during the 1950s about flat surfaces, it is difficult to disregard De Stijl.

As Gombrich has repeatedly shown, we are not naïve enough to still believe in the spirit of the time, regardless of the extent to which it continues to haunt us.⁵⁰ But, as the first chapter of this book suggests, it is equally naïve and fruitless to deny broad links within history. Everyone judges the past on the basis of such interpretations. Despite its spirit-of-the-time element, Wöllflin's now famous statement about history, at the beginning of *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe (Principles of Art History)*, is still valid today:

*Not everything is possible at every moment, and some ideas can only be conceived at certain stages of development.*⁵¹

Such a statement makes it clear that the last word on progress in art has not yet been said.

6 The End of Art

The cakewalk in the present

The previous chapter described how one artistic movement, De Stijl, utilized concepts of progress. It also looked at the extent to which this movement viewed as progress the innovations it propagated and implemented. Chapter four, 'On Making Revolution,' offered an explanation for the major role that such concepts can play. The explanation made use of Thomas S. Kuhn's model for change in the sciences, a model that pays considerable attention to the revolutionary character of transitional phases and that, moreover, allows for a number of external factors, unlike earlier explanatory models.

Kuhn's model casts light from various angles on the manner in which changes in the arts took place during recent centuries. The early years of De Stijl, for example, were dominated by a feeling of impasse and ill-ease. This discontent with the status quo of the visual arts and architecture showed similarities to what Kuhn describes as a generally prevailing anomaly in the sciences. A series of new techniques and procedures were introduced by the movement, and analogous to what Kuhn claims for the sciences, the most important changes were initiated by the younger generation or relative outsiders. The element of a 'radical switch,' aptly characterized by Kuhn as a *Gestalt switch*, was also present in De Stijl. Initially, De Stijl innovators met with incomprehension and disdain, because both their way of experiencing things and their visual vocabulary differed too much from the Dutch tradition and context.

The term *Gestalt switch* refers to the revolutionary content of change, and is an appropriate metaphor for illustrating the complex, radical nature of change in the arts. With another vocabulary and another way of seeing, the world changes. Such changes occur increasingly often in the history of the avant-garde: a new movement or trend continually emerges. In this way, the history of the arts gains an incredible momentum. The radical variant of the avant-garde, with its 'break' idiom, thus gradually becomes less of a variant. In the end, the avant-garde becomes a permanent revolution in which there are scarcely any pauses. The periods during which a specific artistic system of norms prevails (the counterpart of Kuhn's 'normal science') gradually become shorter, until, ultimately, they dissolve, in an uninterrupted revolutionary state, something often denounced as a 'crisis' in the arts during the course of

the twentieth century. Such a crisis can be characterized as an accumulation of *Gestalt switches*, in which everyone not constantly in a process of change irrevocably ends up standing on the wrong foot, as in the cakewalk.

The more often breaks with the past occur, the more problematic the reflections on the question of development become, and with this, reflections on the role and position of the avant-garde, as described at the end of chapter three. This is one reason why, until now, this book has not looked beyond the historic avant-garde. Philosophers and historians of thought and of the arts tend to have great difficulty with the present; it almost defies classification. The prevailing climate in the arts seems to be one of a widespread crisis of meaning, of a never-before exhibited cultural pluralism that can only be described as fragmentation.¹ Nonetheless, the intention of the last two chapters of this book is to venture to skate a few laps over this thin ice of a barely solidified past full of present-day holes. The departure from progress during the postmodern debunking of the 'grand narratives,' the constantly accentuated – and sometimes even celebrated – feeling of crisis in the various arts today, the total conceptual confusion in thought about art as a consequence of an all too noncommittal pluriformity, our complex relationship with the immense and awe-inspiring past (it almost inspires us to death), the rapid dissolution of idealism and ideology in today's Western culture, the mixing of genres in the contemporary arts, the rapidly increasing interaction between art and advertising, art and the new media, and art and design, as well as the increasing criticism of the classical Western canon as an expression of a conservative, sometimes even ostensibly repressive, cultural policy – all this calls for a reconsideration of the relationship between the present, the past, and the future in the arts. This chapter will attempt to do precisely that, by focusing on the ubiquitous idea of the end of art and the reality of such unconsoling thoughts. The remaining skepticism toward progress will also be considered. The final chapter of this book will then attempt to provide an answer to all of the apocalyptic warnings directed at present-day art.

The avant-garde as apotheosis: the end of art

The avant-garde is over. There are few influential artists or professional art critics who would still deny this. This is not to demean the results, but we look at the work of Kandinsky or Willem de Kooning as we would at that of Rembrandt or Poussin; in principle, we read García Lorca or Joyce no differently than we would Dante or Cervantes; we listen with the same ear to Ligeti or Webern as we would to Josquin des Prez and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach; and we look at Gothic cathedrals with the same eyes as we use to look at Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture. In this sense, whether we like it or not, pluralism

and the chronological arbitrariness with regard to the past – those hallmark features of postmodernism – are a given.

During the course of the twentieth century, the avant-garde conferred a status on the various arts resembling that of a religion, but then a religion with so many denominations and branches that it was no longer recognizable as such. By now, to cite the words of Kirk Varnedoe, art is ‘not so much a cult with a bible as a culture without a constitution.’² And, one might add, without a history. Or, *with* a history, but then in the old sense of the word, as in *historia magistra vitae*, through which resonates the voice of all the great examples from the past. Robert Hughes summarized it poignantly in 1980 in ‘The Future that Was’:

*Picasso is no longer a contemporary, or a father figure; he is a remote ancestor, who can inspire admiration but not opposition. The age of the New, like that of Pericles, has entered history.*³

Strangely enough, the end of the avant-garde is scarcely attributable to the previously described paradox – namely that the avant-garde wanted art to dissolve into life and thus (in the Hegelian sense) be abolished (*aufgehoben*). This is because, regardless of the extent to which this paradox formed the heart of the avant-garde’s aesthetic program, it managed to have a long and successful existence within that movement. It was for other reasons that the avant-garde perished.

First and foremost, the rise of the historical avant-garde is inextricably linked with an accelerating sense of time in Western culture. The idea that developments occur ever faster is closely related to notions of progress. The practice of the avant-garde is almost an example of ‘pure culture,’ at least insofar as it itself has not set the tone for that accelerating sense of time. This movement considered the present as both a culmination of the past and an increasingly urgent task for the future. But when movements follow each other in quick succession and the gap between important events continues to diminish, this sense of time is eventually undermined. How high is a pinnacle when, the very next moment, one finds oneself looking at a new peak? The house of the avant-garde gradually turned out to be built on quicksand, a problem that had already been acknowledged earlier by some, including the previously mentioned art historian Tietze, who, to his dismay, observed that some paintings were old before their paint had even dried.

In her 1989 lecture ‘Traditions of the New,’ Susan Sontag discussed and criticized this accelerated view of history, noting that time is measured and experienced in terms of increasingly short intervals. History may once have been a series of shorter or longer periods, often related to a specific power, but after the French Revolution, time began to be divided into centuries. By the

end of the nineteenth century, the concept of 'generation' had emerged, and since the 1960s – the phrasing already suggests it – time has mostly been conceived in terms of decades, retrospectively as well: during the 1950s themselves, the 1950s did not yet exist.⁴

During the course of this development, thought on the relationship between the past, the present, and the future acquired the highly confusing character already sketched at the end of chapter four. 'Our art collections, our poetry anthologies, and our libraries,' wrote Octavio Paz in 1974,

*are full of prematurely aged styles, movements, paintings, sculptures, novels, poems. We feel dizzy: what has just happened already belongs to the world of the infinitely remote, while at the same time the ancient of ancients is infinitely near. We may conclude that the modern tradition and the contradictory ideas and images evoked by this notion are the result of an even more disturbing phenomenon: the modern era marks the acceleration of historical time. If years, months, and days actually do not pass more quickly now, at least more things happen in them. And more things happen at the same time – not in succession, but simultaneously. Such acceleration produces fusion: all times and all spaces flow together in one here and now.*⁵

It is nearly impossible to discuss recent developments in the arts in terms of progress in such near-apocalyptic confusion, as was illustrated in chapter four by Hans Belting's observation that (visual) art today reflects the past without continuing it, and that art history is no longer able to maintain a model of progress.⁶ Insofar as today's arts and the reflections on them allow themselves to be busy with notions of progress, it is, in the first place, a destructive engagement: the necessity of breaking with the past and striking out in a new direction is acknowledged, but this revolutionary sentiment leaves no room for the continuity and linearity presupposed in notions of progress. Where there are continual breaks, not the slightest trace of direction or progress is to be found. In the best of cases, there is a lively pluriformity, a contemporaneity of the radically different, as Bürger dubbed it.⁷ Consciously or not, this formulation goes further than the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous,' which, according to Koselleck, has existed since the end of the eighteenth century. In the end, because of their extreme diversity, different developments occurring at the same time can no longer be distinguished from one another. Only *one* time remains, the chronological time, and within that time, independent chains of events or, in this case, artistic achievements. Non-contemporaneity no longer has any meaning here.

Together with the effect of the recurring break and the vertigo that accompanies the historical acceleration, another problem emerges that seems to make the idea of progress in the arts obsolete, a problem touched on at the

end of chapter three. During the twentieth century, the various arts became increasingly engaged in reflection on their own aesthetic discourse. 'To form a School in modern times,' wrote influential American art critic Harold Rosenberg in 1959, 'not only is a new painting consciousness needed, but a consciousness of that consciousness [...].'⁸ Art works in other disciplines also developed an ever-larger conceptual component. The emergence and influence of serialism in the avant-garde music of the 1950s forms a good example. In his reflections on tonal duration and pitch, Karlheinz Stockhausen attempted to break through the distinction between these two fundamental musical principles (in, for example, *Gruppen für drei Orchester*), while composer Pierre Boulez later devoted himself to 'composing space' (as in his *Répons*).

By now, poetry, musical compositions, sculptures, paintings, or buildings are no longer to be understood only within a specific tradition, but also as conceptual commentary on other poetry, music, sculptures, and architecture. That commentary is critical, admiring, dismissive, ironic, or pedantic. It could add something to another work of art, just as Francis Bacon's famous *Study after Velázquez: Pope Innocent X* (1953) did, or it could be inspired by and structured on a work from the past, as Joyce's *Ulysses* was on the *Odyssey*, to give a classic modernist example. It could relegate a whole genre or a specific procedure to history, as the critique (voiced by Greenberg) in the work of American painters from the 1950s and 1960s did to the painterly tradition of perspective. Alternatively, the commentary could use its own activity as its theme, the way autonomous poetry takes poetry itself as its subject, and a film can be about making a film, with Fellini's *8½* as the well-known apogee. Or, it could be ironic and eclectic, as in postmodern architecture, which quotes from its own past. Or, a work of art could have philosophical significance, as demonstrated in the Mondrian quotation in the previous chapter, where he characterizes Neo-Plasticism as the 'aesthetic manifestation of the universal.'

At some point, the conceptual and reflexive content of art increases to such an extent that it begins to affect the status of art itself. The question 'what is art?' is posed increasingly often in the art work itself. Paradoxically, what art is and is not becomes increasingly unclear. This can be vividly illustrated through the example of the gallery owner in New York who once invited Marcel Duchamp, a founding father of conceptual visual art, to participate in an exhibition of self-portraits. The artist responded with the following telegram: 'This is my portrait if I say this is my portrait.' The gallery owner hung the telegram next to the self-portraits of the other artists. When Duchamp later sent him an invoice, the gallery owner replied with a telegram saying: 'This is a cheque if I say it is a cheque.'⁹ In such a discourse, it is easy to make Duchamp the art dealer and the gallery owner the artist, who, with his telegram, outdoes Duchamp's conceptual art work.

The greater the conceptual component of an art work, the more difficult it becomes to place it within a linear history. Art works branch out into a web of unequal relationships, into a continually changing and often ambiguous constellation, where chronology still plays a part but more as a calendar than as a logical sequence of periods. Art works can no longer initially be understood in the context of a well-defined tradition. They are primarily participants in an extremely complex discourse of mutual cross-references that, moreover, shows little stability. It can therefore be stated that the large degree of reflection and commentary has done little good to the already faltering belief in notions of progress in the late avant-garde.

Along with the increasing acceleration, the recurrent break, and the steadily growing component of immanent reflection, a fourth factor can be mentioned that confirms the end of the avant-garde. It is the mingling of art, in the traditional sense, with popular culture, the dissolution of the boundary between 'high' and 'low.' In some respects, this is a much older phenomenon. In literature, folktales have been doing this since Romanticism. The same is true of folk music and the Romantic composers, as well as of jazz, in later composers like Milhaud and Stravinsky. In the 1960s, however, a breakthrough came with pop music and the related cultural turn, as well as – albeit initially in a more isolated way – with Pop Art in the visual arts.¹⁰ In this sense, an old ideal of the avant-garde was realized with respect to the closing of the gap between art and life. At the same time, however, the identity of avant-garde art came under serious threat. Moreover, the advance of popular culture and that culture's increasing symbiosis with art brought with it a form of artistic inflation that had already been proclaimed by Walter Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.'¹¹ Because art, particularly visual art and music, can be disseminated, viewed, and listened to through a wide variety of media (photography, film, new printing techniques, the record player, and later, the CD player, television, video, computer, and the Internet), the art work has lost its 'auratic value,' and thus the uniqueness and exaltedness that have long been attributed to it.

According to some, all these developments signify more than just a farewell to the avant-garde. Is it not true that all of modern art is disappearing? Are we not witnessing the end of a centuries-long process that parallels what occurs in political history? Is this not, in other words, a manifestation, or variation, of what, since Fukuyama, has become popularly known as 'the end of history'? It is precisely the emergence of notions of progress in this much-discussed question that suggests an intriguing coherence. Chapter two described how, together with the emergence of the aesthetic domain, ideas of progress with an open future claimed a place, and how these two developments coalesced in the importance that began to be placed on the imagination during the eighteenth century. Art or, better perhaps, the arts only gained a

unique identity in an autonomous, aesthetic domain after the value of the imagination – *inventio* – soared, from the moment the communal pump was abandoned in favor of the private well, to evoke Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin's metaphor once again. The power of the imagination played a crucial role in changing historical thought: through human creativity, the horizon of expectation could be pushed ever further and a modern perspective of progress without finalism became possible.

The indirect and, of course, much more complex link between art's identity and notions of progress seems to have surfaced again, albeit in reverse, toward the end of the twentieth century. During these years, there appears to have been at least the suggestion of contemporaneity between the disappearance of ideas of progress in art and the loss of identity in the arts themselves. So if progress in the arts turns out to be an idle fiction, do the arts have the right to exist? Are there not perhaps very solid grounds for speculating about the end of art?

It is striking that Arthur Danto, whose thesis about the end of the (visual) arts was referred to in the introduction of this book, bases his thesis on precisely a critique of the idea of progress in the arts. As we have already seen, he interprets the history of art neither as an increasingly successful depiction nor a better representation of reality, nor as a continual development of the means of expression. His conception of the history of art sees modern art through Hegel's philosophy of art (however bizarre that theory may be, he concedes), as a manifestation of increasing self-awareness.¹² In the tradition of Duchamp, and culminating in the 1960s, the (visual) arts gradually develop an ever-increasing conceptual component. Jasper Johns's flags, Roy Lichtenstein's blown-up comic strips, Carl André's steel plates, and Andy Warhol's famous *Brillo Box* all reflect the problem of the distinction between art and reality. A soapbox displayed by Warhol cannot be distinguished visually from a soapbox that is *not* art. Apparently, it is no longer the visible or tangible qualities that count, only the conceptual ones.¹³

The work of such artists thus not only reflects on the nature of art, it becomes conscious of itself as art and thus affects the identity of art itself. In doing so, it sounds the death knell for contemporary art, which, after this development, no longer has any historical importance:

*The historical stage of art is done with when it is known what art is and means. The artists have made the way open for philosophy, and the moment has arrived at which the task must be transferred finally into the hands of the philosophers.*¹⁴

This Hegelian finality leaves no room for ideas of progress that presuppose an open future. Because one can speak of completion here, namely the self-awareness that is attained, art does away with itself as a historic phenomenon. The posthistoric era has dawned, says Danto, without a hint of Jeremian

lament, although, he writes rather amusingly, it has been ‘an immense privilege to have lived in history.’¹⁵

Forward again: the end of Arthur Danto

In recent years, the end of art has been proclaimed by a large number of artists, art critics, and art theorists. But because the most complete and convincing argumentation in this often little more than obscure debate is found in Danto, Danto’s view warrants the necessary attention. According to him, in none of the three ways that give shape to art history – the mimetic perspective, the view that art is primarily an expression of feelings or moods, and lastly the idea that art works constitute part of an autonomous, reflexive system – is it possible today to speak of progress.¹⁶

Danto’s interpretation of the first view of art – art as representation – is rather limited. The suggestion is that this view is only applicable to a sensorial representation of reality. Through this reduction of art to the visual representation of the world, it is obvious that painting and sculpture ended at the beginning of the twentieth century, when, after photography, cinema turned out to be a deadly competitor. It could, after all, reproduce movement whereas the visual arts would never be able to go beyond the mere suggestion of movement. In itself, the invention and artistic application of these genres form a good argument for progress in the arts. But if one disregards this for a moment, the bleakness of Danto’s conception of art as representation, here at least, becomes evident. Even Gombrich, whom Danto cites, with his Popper-inspired ‘schema and correction’ model, has a noticeably more refined vision of representation. For Gombrich, the illusion evoked by the art work is the tool through which to understand appearances. However, he has such great difficulty with abstract art that does not refer directly to visual reality that the problem of the end of art undeniably emerges in his work too, albeit in a different way than in Danto’s.¹⁷ With the publication of Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of Art* in 1968, now a standard work on representation in art, it was convincingly shown that the various arts refer to reality in a significantly more complex way, as we shall see later. The mimetic approach to art presented by Danto is only one (and the simplest one at that) example of this. It therefore remains highly questionable whether an end to the development of art as representation can be proclaimed.

According to Danto, the second approach to art – art as expression – is equally inflexible in allowing for progress in art history. Herein lies the shortcoming of Danto’s tripartite division, whose undoubted popularity in various forms of art criticism does not make it appropriate for characterizing the *historiography* of the arts. Danto does not go much beyond Croce. (For this rea-

son, in the last essay of *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, he probably replaces the second approach with a 'history of symbolic forms,' citing Panofsky's iconological work as an example. It would, however, have been better to group this approach under representation.¹⁸) But neither is it clear in this example why art has reached an endpoint. If one views art as an expression of feelings and moods, it is certainly possible, even on the basis of a (in Danto's view non-existent) 'mediating technology of expression,' to distinguish various forms of development. Over time, a steadily growing and more refined range of artistic means of expression has become possible. Think of the participation of – or interaction with – spectators in *performances*, or of the new visual vocabulary of such influential movements as Abstract Expressionism, or, in another area, of the invention of the interior monologue in literature, the computer manipulation of images in film and video art, and, especially, the interactive possibilities of the new media. In this way Steve Reich's or Philip Glass's minimal music, for example, no longer expresses Beethoven's mood of loneliness and revolt, but rather a new and different kind of (meditative) mood, evoked through the continual repetition of short sequences. Why would the 'historic role' of art have come to an end here?

The third, 'Hegelian' form of historiography, a kind of self-development of the Spirit in art, is the approach Danto supports, an approach that, in many respects, results in an adequate intrinsic characterization of developments in the visual arts. In that sense it is quite valuable. Together, the frequent attempts to define what art is, whether or not 'in essence,' the increasingly exploited, ambiguous, and ironic discourse of self-analysis, and the repeatedly thematized reflection on renewal have irrefutably affected and rendered problematic the identity of the arts. Nevertheless, categorical statements about the future of art must, if nothing else, be considered speculative. Danto and like-minded prophets in fact exclude the possibility that in, say, a hundred years' time, it will be possible to view today's visual arts in terms of development.

This would seem difficult to uphold. How, for example, can Danto guarantee that a new Hegel in sheep's clothing will not stand up in 2040 and proclaim that after the immense progress of the last century – that could only really begin with profound reflection, as was so masterfully articulated at the time by art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto – that after that impressive century of progress, which so convincingly crossed the threshold into the third millennium, the visual arts have finally reached their full realization? Moreover, the proclamation of the end of the visual arts is less unusual than the public sometimes thinks. Such apocalyptic pronouncements are, for example, found repeatedly since Dadaism, as revealed in the previous chapter. *De Stijl*, for example, published van Doesburg's manifesto on the end of art, and, a few years earlier, through Mondrian, posited that art '(in the traditional sense) is in the process of progressive dissolution.'¹⁹

The hypothesis of the end of art as a historical phenomenon loses even more ground when other arts are included in the analysis. While a similar feeling of crisis cannot be denied there, even if that feeling were caused by the continual cry of revolution and the resulting sense of an unremitting acceleration of time, this still does not mean that all future possibilities for art are finished or that they can be abolished by postmodern decree. Insofar as these crises can be attributed to an (Hegelian or other) increase in reflection and conceptualization, this says little about the possibility of progress in art, as will be argued in the last chapter.

Lastly, Danto's treatment of visual art is too one-sided, because he limits himself to the third, Hegelian perspective. The discourse of the visual arts contains more than just conceptual utterances; it is leavened just as much with forms of representation and expression. These may often be influenced by conceptual references, but they are not entirely reducible to them. Sigmar Polke's paintings, praised by Danto, are thus often figurative. The familiar scenes do not, of course, refer to reality in the same way as a portrait by Anthony van Dyck or Monet's water lilies, but neither are they completely reducible to formal references and philosophical concepts, as would seem to follow from Danto's observations. Moreover, although Polke's work emanates a certain mood or emotional dimension that is partly the result of references to other painters and traditions, it cannot be entirely attributed to them. This mood is not totally irrelevant, if for no other reason than that the public approaches the work instinctively; Polke's paintings figure in this interaction and also derive meaning from this context. By the same token, Warhol's soapboxes, so often cited by Danto, are not merely the philosophical statements he considers them to be; they have other meanings as well, for example, parodic ones, even when the artist himself explicitly denies this. Art is a more complex phenomenon than Danto suggests in his arguments on the end of art.²⁰

This can be further illustrated by Jeff Koons's work, which undoubtedly first deserves to be understood and viewed within the conceptual framework that Danto deems so characteristic of today's visual art. Koons's oeuvre is really only accessible to those who are at least slightly aware of the present discourse in the visual arts. It explores the limits of what still constitutes art by showing magnified, blown-up, often copied, kitsch at exhibitions (*Banality*, 1988), or by depicting pornography in which the artist himself plays a major role (*Made in Heaven*, 1991). Koons appears to be the perfect example for Danto's approach because his work exists thanks to a play on references and commentary that is as ironic as it is complex. But it is going too far to deny all representational and expressive meaning in Koons's work. *Ilona's House Ejaculation*, a silkscreen from 1991 comprising a hugely magnified pornographic photograph (152.4 x 228.6 cm) in which the ejaculating artist and his wife, Italian porno star and politician Ilona Staller, are depicted, is undeniably a

statement in the current art discourse. But it *refers*, equally inevitably, to reality, and certainly not only through symbolic codes. Moreover, while this work may evoke emotions (excitement, disgust, confusion, amazement, irritation, amusement), it also expresses them. The oversized, detailed sexual intimacy depicted within Koons's overlapping frames of reference, of pornography and the artistic system, thus also creates a cool alienating distance with regard to what is generally seen as an extremely personal experience. This confrontation of extremes – of the most intimate with the most anonymous public exposure, of the classic crude cliché with lofty artistic intentions – leaves few spectators unaffected today. To cite a Koons's admirer, Frankfurt museum director Jean-Christophe Ammann:

*Koons' passionate attachment to the artificial, cute, mannered and baroque in style, advertising and knick-knacks goes hand in hand with the coldness of pared-back and frozen feeling.*²¹

Without further discussing Koons's sense of detail, it will be apparent that the end of the visual arts, in which Danto believes, is only tenable if representation and expression are dismissed as outdated and irrelevant. This reflects a limited perspective, particularly when we take the other arts into consideration. Time and again what we see is a mixture of representation, expression, and conceptual references, whereby representation plays perhaps a greater role in literature, and expression and conceptual references play perhaps a greater role in music. A novel describes a reality that is indeed fictitious, but in that description, it always borrows a large number of elements from a non-fictional reality. The tones of a musical composition often refer to other music or have an expressive function, but there is little of the universal dissolution into abstract concepts that Danto claims to observe in the visual arts. The death of the novel was announced repeatedly during the twentieth century, sometimes with impressive arguments, yet no fewer (or less innovative) novels are being written and read as a result. A similar statement can be made about theater and music. Only the newer art forms such as film and video art are excluded as yet from such pronouncements.

The end of the avant-garde signals neither the end of art nor the end of art history, as Danto would suggest. At least, it is not for us – the involved parties and the contemporaries – to judge. Danto in fact writes the history of his own time in the best tradition of the avant-garde. 'He does not wait for the news,' critic Daniel Herwitz observes, 'he invents it.'²²

Danto's view represents a series of debatable attempts to dispense with art (as a historical phenomenon), or, rather, to abolish art in a Hegelian sense and to let it become philosophy by attributing to it a growing 'self-awareness.' In proclaiming the death sentence for (visual) art, he joins a long and question-

able philosophical tradition. Here, too, *arti philosophia lupus*: philosophy is a wolf to art. From Plato to Hegel, and repeatedly since then, philosophers have both contested art's right to exist and limited its possibilities, by interpreting art as a form of philosophy that is either illustration – and thus, redundant – or that became obsolete long ago.

Farewell to progress?

One of the great merits of the debate on postmodernism lies in the surfacing of the notions of progress that continue to haunt us. But, in the arts, postmodernism has theoretically outsmarted such intuitions about the past without having produced many useful results in the process. Because, when in art, as a result of the farewell to history, the so-often praised total freedom of 'anything goes' is celebrated, this is inevitably accompanied by an uneasy feeling of the non-committal, which in turn robs that freedom of much of its glory. But Nietzsche's (at the time so cheerfully argued) abolishment of the past does not yet relieve someone who acts of the need to conceive a future that can give meaning and purpose to the present. Every artist looks for a way through time, and finds – in and through history – a possibility of orienting himself. That orientation is indispensable for creating art, just as every art viewer interprets art in a context that also always has a historical dimension.

Formulated pragmatically, the question is, therefore, what exactly do we gain from the ahistorical perception of time that has arisen in the arts? Perhaps artists and art viewers are jettisoning historical categories rather too lightheartedly: so long as the arts follow a certain path in their development, it would seem both pathetic and unproductive to discard map, compass, and sextant all at the same time. This presupposes, however, that one way or another the arts can develop in a specific, not undesirable direction.

In the meantime, now that it appears the endpoint of the arts may not be so very close after all, the discussion of notions of progress once again becomes important. Suggestions were made above for the way in which such ideas may become topical in a more contemporary guise. Yet before discussing this at greater length in the next chapter, several other objections to the idea of progress in history must be mentioned that are too compelling to be ignored. A number of arguments were offered at the beginning of this book regarding the inadequacies of notions of progress as an instrument for describing the history of the arts. These arguments criticized the assumed conceptual realism of such concepts, although without rendering every discussion of progress superfluous. Yet there are also other, more familiar, forms of skepticism toward progress in the arts.

To begin with, it is relevant to recall the previously cited observation by

Thomas Kuhn, that whereas science discards knowledge from the past, art from the past continues to play a role. Rembrandt's work has, after all, not been appreciated any less since Picasso's success. The past, I argued earlier, remains pervasive and omniscient. What is made later does not have to be better, in the same way as older masterpieces are not worse (or better) than subsequent works. So what standard should apply here if no absolute and eternal criteria for the arts can be identified? As Russian poet Osip Mandelstam put it in 1921, there simply is no 'literary machine,' and, moreover, who is to say whether or not as much has been lost as gained. This can even be seen within the oeuvre of a single writer, because, he writes,

[w]here in Anna Karenina, in which Tolstoi [sic] assimilated the care for structure and the psychological power of a Flaubertian novel, is the natural instinct and physiological intuition of War and Peace? Where in War and Peace is the limpid form, the 'clarism' of Childhood and Youth?

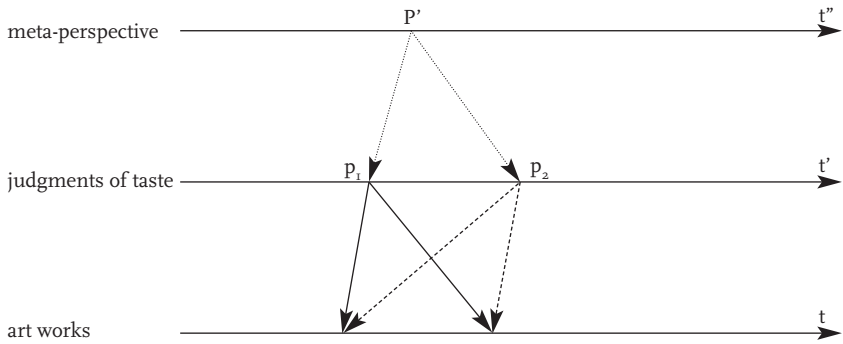
According to Mandelstam, one might just as well write a history about achievements as about all that has been lost, for they would be the same.²³

An additional, but not unimportant, problem here is that progress (or thinking in terms of achievements) presupposes a value judgment that in itself is subject to change. A lover of Romantic music may interpret the development from the Baroque, via Classicism, to Romanticism as progress but be unable to see Messiaen or Shostakovich as preserving or improving on Chopin or Tchaikovsky. The perspective through which development is evaluated depends on a value judgment. Because standards change, what is intrinsically understood as progress changes too. This is why new historical stories are continually being constructed – as progress-driven prehistories of the present generally dictated by present-day standards. This time-bound dependence of norms implies different levels of perspective: not only does the situation in a specific period change, so does the way of looking at that period (figure 1).

The normative dimension of the concept of progress repeatedly poses a problem. Dutch Slavist and essayist Karel van het Reve clarified this once in an essay on progress in art, with his categorical statement that better music was never composed after Mozart.²⁴ His (slightly ironically formulated) certainty highlights the opinion held by many, that judgments on art can only ostensibly appeal to objectivity; someone else may say with equal aplomb that Beethoven, Bach, or a contemporary composer is the pinnacle. Whoever thinks that a judgment of taste in art is entirely subjective obviously has no interest in notions of progress, which, after all, are based on specific norms.

The idea of progress in art is not only absurd, the same author claimed, it

Figure 1



This diagram illustrates the complexity of perspectives on progress. The bottom time axis is that of the art works. The middle one is the normative perspective of the art works. From the perspective of a given point P_1 (e.g. the end of the nineteenth century), one views and evaluates a period (e.g. the Renaissance). This perspective changes; before Jacob Burckhardt's description (and construction) of the Renaissance, art works from that period were viewed and judged differently, while the view of Renaissance art works differs again today (P_2). This is observed from the meta-perspective P' , which is in turn time-bound.

is also dangerous. The artist will quickly be driven by other than genuinely stimulating forces, such as a sense of duty toward progress or the fear of being seen as old-fashioned, while the art consumer will exhaust himself on contemporary works at the expense of time and energy that might have been devoted to historical masterpieces.

Such skepticism is not directed toward the descriptive notion of progress; it simply opposes its accompanying prescriptive claims. Similar objections surfaced regularly during the second half of the twentieth century. Various comments have been made throughout this book on the negative impact of the notion of progress in the arts. Skepticism toward the prescriptive notion of progress was unacceptable, however, for a long time, and, in the eyes of many, amounted to no more than the ritual complaining of conservative critics. During recent decades, though, a growing number of artists have begun to suffer from the ideology of progressiveness. In 1954, British writer and painter Wyndham Lewis (1884-1957), initially an avid proponent of the avant-garde, devoted a whole book to such reservations, as clearly reflected in his title *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*. The notion of progress also came under explicit attack in art itself.²⁵

Because, over time, the arts had come to be seen through an all-encompassing perspective of progress, artists and critics increasingly began to

reflect on the role and identity of art. History constantly looked over their shoulder, whereby art slowly but surely lost its self-evident nature. Art began to feel compelled to explain itself with respect to the spirit of the time. Viewed in this light, art lost its innocence on account of progress, as the French intellectuals would say, and, with the arrival of modernism at the end of the nineteenth century, gradually began to become more conceptual.

This development, described by Danto in slightly different words, ran parallel to a transformation in which the historical orientation and legitimation of the art work increasingly came to the fore. For reasons described in chapter four, a progressive ideology gradually emerged that resulted in the imperative of progress. Artists were expected to follow the historical path, with its one-way traffic and absence of stop signs. Art was to become progressively more experimental; innovations were to be assessed increasingly according to the degree of change and less according to other, intrinsic criteria. Young talent became the highest good; experimentation, avant-garde, revolution, and provocation became the watchwords long after they were already threadbare. Criticism lost its authority because it bowed to the fear of misjudging the newest, and thus of being sidelined by progress.

During the past two decades, however, art criticism has made a comeback. Complaints are being voiced of performances that go no further than artificial experimentation, of unreadable books, of unpalatable music, of a ritual urge to innovate. New generations of artists are successfully opposing the canonized innovators, and, for their part, have age on their side. Countless avant-garde experiments are running aground in obligatory repetition. The *nouveau roman*, the self-referential poem, serial music, modernist architecture – all this is gradually disappearing from the map. The vanguards are dissolving as a consequence of the previously mentioned blending, in nearly all art forms, of elite art and ‘low culture,’ itself partly originating in the avant-garde, an interaction that makes it even more difficult to distinguish between what is more and what is less progressive.

For whoever draws up the balance sheet, the curtain would appear to have fallen on the idea of progress: the concept is old hat, passé, history. It fails as a descriptive model, and it has precipitated a ubiquitous crisis in the arts. It makes artists unhappy and art lovers uneasy. Yet this book has no desire to drive yet another nail into the coffin of progress. ‘Old hat,’ ‘passé,’ Danto’s ‘postmodern’ and ‘posthistoric’ era – all these terms still carry in them an element of time with an evaluative implication suggesting that they are not yet entirely free of the ‘progress’ virus.²⁶ Here, too, it would seem, Hercules’s second labor has not yet been completed: the Progress monster keeps rearing its ugly head. For some years now, thanks to postmodernism and theories like Danto’s, it has been back on the agenda in every manner of disguise.

7 A New Approach to an Old Concept

So long as one leaves [a problem] unliquidated, there is always a chance of it turning out to one's advantage.¹

Italo Svevo

The concept of progress assumes that developments exhibit a certain continuity and direction, that there is some evidence of accumulation in the phenomena involved, and that the change accompanying these developments is desirable. So, to what extent is there still room today, despite the prevailing skepticism, for someone to attach any importance to ideas of progress in art? There are roughly two types of arguments in support of such progress. The first can be grouped under the ostensibly trivial slogan that art may, indeed, not become increasingly beautiful (better, more didactic, more moving, more convincing, and so on), but that there is a growing variety of it. The second views art as a cognitive system out of which an ever richer interpretation of reality and possible realities may emerge.

Ever richer

Arguments of the first type are based mainly on a quantitative principle, namely that, over time, a growing number of techniques, procedures, styles, and forms of expression become available, together with an ever-increasing number of works of art and even entire new branches of art.² All of the following phenomena point to what is a more or less cohesive process: the use of acrylic paint, the invention of collage, the incorporation of music principles from non-Western cultures, the role of chance in compositions, the new possibilities of lighting in theater, the twelve-tone system, the flashback, the interior monologue, parlando poetry, the deployment of the computer in numerous art forms, and countless other new techniques and procedures; the birth of new art forms such as opera, photography, film, and video or of genres like the sonnet, the symphony, the nude, and the television drama; and, above all, the steadily increasing number of art works. This cohesive process or, rather, these cohesive processes are cumulative, and demonstrate continuity in the sense that the number of procedures and techniques does not suddenly

diminish, large numbers of artworks are not suddenly swept away, and entire art disciplines do not instantly disappear. (Strictly speaking, of course, this possibility does exist, given our access to weapons of mass destruction, a foretaste of which we were given with the bombing and destruction of architecture during the two World Wars.) However trivial the argument in itself may be, as long as we assume that an increase in the number of styles and procedures, works of art, and art disciplines implies an enrichment, it is not far-fetched to speak of progress in the arts. To restate Condorcet's argument: even in an age where there are no Raphaels or Carraccis, there need not be regression, because we preserve the achievements of the past.

In chapter five, several examples of quantitative progress were described in detail, such as the creation of a new language of images by the De Stijl movement. One of the central principles of that new language was to seek harmony while, at the same time, avoiding symmetry; it was put into practice in architecture and painting. Another example was the new way that forms of expression were used in painting, namely without reference to a visible reality.

However, this kind of increase in art manifests itself in a way that is not merely quantitative. Numerous works of art comment on earlier works, deriving their power and meaning not only from the tradition from which they emerge, but also by adding something new to the works of that tradition. Picasso's drawings and paintings after Velázquez's *Las Meninas* allow the viewer to henceforth look at the little girl with the dog's face in this group portrait with the same delight as the artist, through his accentuation of shape and color. Tirso de Molina's *El burlador de Sevilla* was given new life as Don Juan in subsequent centuries by Mozart, Byron, and Pushkin. Johann Sebastian Bach was retrieved from obscurity and subsequently interpreted in an entirely new way by Mendelssohn, and, in the second half of the twentieth century, by an ever-expanding tradition of Bach interpretations.

Martin Seel rightfully sees such mutual confrontations of artists and art works as enrichment through the accentuation of differences. In his view, this is an important argument in favor of the idea of progress in art. In the criticism that Barnett Newman, based on his aesthetics of the sublime, leveled with his *Who's afraid of red, yellow and blue?* at Mondrian's 'idealizing abstraction,' Seel argues, one artist is not refuting another, but an aesthetic difference is being articulated: 'We, perceiving the aesthetic force of both Mondrian and Newman, decide not to decide this controversy – for reasons given to us by the best works of these painters.'³ Commentary from sources other than the artists or the artworks themselves, such as from art, literary, and music historians and critics and philosophers, also contributes interpretive possibilities that are enriching to art. Hegel's commentary on Antigone, and Heidegger's on Hölderlin are two examples. Another is the influence that Schopenhauer's aesthetics had on the interpretation of art, even among artists, as reflected in Mondrian and even more clearly in Wagner.

But there is also a down side to the quantitative argument, a problem that was touched on in the previous chapter, namely, that the more commentary art gives and therefore the more conceptual it becomes, the more its identity comes under threat. If this development advances as far as Danto suggests – and this is certainly the case in several trends in the visual arts and in various forms of poetry and novels – art becomes philosophy (or conversation). This can, of course, be construed as progress, but it is no longer progress *in art*. It remains difficult to determine how much conceptual content a work can carry, but this in no way precludes the critics having something to say on the issue.

The quantitative arguments mentioned above reveal nothing about whether a higher artistic level is gradually achieved in the production and reception of art. Indeed, this question cannot be answered because, as chapter six argued, aesthetic values are continually changing. This is why progress cannot be described simply in terms of artistic quality, if such a thing even exists. An example will help clarify this. Imagine a person or group of connoisseurs wondering whether within a certain period, say between point A and point B in a certain branch of art – for example between 1840 and 1890 in German poetry – there is such a thing as progress in the artistic sense. It would make a considerable difference if this question were to be answered according to the aesthetic values of 1875 or those of 2000. Such values are as strongly affected by temporal factors as they are by the developments they are judging. Given art's constantly changing view of the past, this is an insurmountable problem (figure 1). Therefore, where progress in art is concerned, it is not about whether more beautiful music has been composed since Mozart, but whether a lot of other music has been composed and performed.

Kuhn's comparison of science and art is thus not an argument against the applicability of concepts of progress to art. On the contrary: in science, a degree of progress or, rather, of the growth of knowledge exists because theories are rejected; in art, progress exists for precisely the opposite reason – because, in part, results from the past are saved. Ptolemy and Aristotle are pushed from the stage with the appearance of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, but Rembrandts are not removed from the museum wall after the appearance of works by Picasso and Mondrian; instead, new museums get built. Poetry by Petrarch and Quevedo gets read alongside that of W.H. Auden and Joseph Brodsky. In other words: theories displace one another, works of art enrich one another.

Yet within this quantitative approach, the problem remains that quality and thus the artistic merits of a work of art cannot be totally dismissed. Anyone looking at the literature or visual arts of the Soviet Union between 1925 and 1985, for example, will undoubtedly observe a quantitative increase but conceivably have difficulty in characterizing the developments of that period

as progress. On the other hand, this does not mean that the possibility of such progress is denied; one speaks here, rightfully, of a 'standstill.'⁴

The difference between qualitative and quantitative is, in fact, relative, because art always implies a certain artistic quality. However difficult it is to identify or describe that quality, however time-bound or context-dependent it may be, below a certain level (according to the criteria of a well-defined period) artifacts are no longer art because they are no longer recognized as such. Since art always demonstrates diversity and variation, even at the level of the oeuvre of the individual artist – who, after all, cannot endlessly repeat himself – an ever-increasing number of quality works of art (which will later still be recognized as such) comes into being. Through this diversity, the general quality increases, that is, as long as it is not construed as a kind of rising artistic standard.⁵

It is clear that in the quantitative sense, the development of different art forms is not based on any laws. While art can be viewed as a kind of game determined partly by rules and partly by tradition, at the same time rules are constantly broken and put to the test. According to Varnedoe in *A Fine Disregard*, 'the rules of the game here are not something you play by, they're something you play with.' In his view, the modern artist is like the first rugby player, who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, during a game of soccer as it was played at that time, took the ball into his hands 'with a fine disregard for the rules,' and thus created a new sport, partly based on the old tradition, and partly totally different.⁶ And so, on the basis of an endless series of sometimes bizarre ideas, ever more art comes into existence.

A rather strange problem in the quantitative line of reasoning is that it must make plausible the notion that the quantity of art consigned to oblivion through loss or changing aesthetic values is not equal to the amount of new art being made. This argument would seem to be of little significance at a time when so much can be reproduced and stored, and when the production and consumption of art have increased so sharply. Yet it is not easy to discount the seemingly endless procession of ghosts of once celebrated artists who have now disappeared and the countless works of art that have been lost. Would it not be just as valid, as Mandelstam suggests, to write a history about what we have lost as about what we have gained? The loss is compounded by the fact that works of art from the past often belonged to a totally different context; not every reference or expression is still comprehensible.

Concerning the latter, though, a great deal can still be made intelligible, as both Erwin Panofsky's iconological work and the flourishing authentic staging practices of old music during recent decades have demonstrated. Furthermore, though many old masterpieces disappear, on the whole, a great many more come into being, and 'masterpieces and unique works' still receive preferential treatment in the conservation, performance, exhibition, and publica-

tion of art. Moreover, many procedures, stylistic methods, and techniques are acquisitions that will continue to be of use. Mandelstam might indeed have asked where ‘the natural instinct and physiological intuition’ of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* went, but Tolstoy could have made use of them again. They are not lost, as Mandelstam suggests; in fact, he says so himself in the same sentence, where he speaks of ‘the constructive capacity and psychological adeptness of the Flaubert novel’ in *Anna Karenina*.⁷ In this way, he concedes that artistic techniques and skills from the past – in this case Flaubert’s – will continue to be used.

Examples of this are visible in the poetry of different languages, where the sonnet reappears at different times, while in architecture, classical forms like the column and the tympanum continually recur, even to the present day. Likewise, modern music utilizes medieval scales and instruments like the recorder, which was thought to have disappeared with the Baroque era, while various painters are reverting to the use of oil paints and, sometimes, tempera.

Art as cognition

The most important arguments in favor of progress in art, however, are not those of a quantitative nature, but those that assume a cognitive content in art. This argument, as we saw earlier, can be seen in Gombrich, although in a restricted sense. The problem with Gombrich is that he never really abandons the mimesis ideal of the Renaissance. This creates problems. Firstly, the increasing skill of Renaissance painters in depicting reality cannot in itself be described simply in terms of progress. Feyerabend demonstrates this in his *Wissenschaft als Kunst* (Science as Art), by pointing out how Vasari and his contemporaries believed they had a much more natural way of depicting because they no longer used harsh colors – bright reds and greens for garments, gold for haloes around the heads of saints, and ultramarine for skies. Although they considered this a form of progress, they did not notice that new mimetic criteria had slipped into their assessment. In fact, their predecessors’ use of color had been designed precisely to accentuate the *unnatural*, the heavenly, and the symbolic.⁸

Interestingly enough, Gombrich was able to apply his ideal of representation until well into the nineteenth century, but with the discovery of photography, and later, of film, the visual arts began to move in a direction that robbed him of his footing. From then on, the mental processes of artists suddenly began to take the place of traditional, purely painterly skills. As Danto demonstrates, references to reality became exceedingly complex, first in Duchamp’s ready-mades, then, more than ever, in conceptual art from the 1960s on.

Suzi Gablik’s cognitive approach to progress in the (visual) arts is striking

in this respect. Her book *Progress in Art* (1976) begins with the observation that many – among whom she expressly includes Gombrich – believe that contemporary art no longer has a future.⁹ Such an end to art (different from the one Danto identified ten years later) is proclaimed by people who don't know what to make of the non-mimetic art – of Malevich and Mondrian, up to Pollock and Stella. To demonstrate that modern art is not bankrupt, Gablik develops a model for progress in the (visual) arts. As her starting point, she takes the developmental psychology of Piaget, who allows cognitive systems to move through different stages in order to chart the environment in an increasingly complex manner. In this perspective, the world is partly structured by cognitive abilities; conversely, these abilities are also partly affected by their environment. Analogous to Piaget's developmental stages for the individual, Gablik develops a structural cognitive development for the history of the visual arts in which she distinguishes three so-called 'mega-periods,' each of which constitutes and describes space in its own way.¹⁰

In early history, space is organized 'subjectively'. Objects are portrayed two-dimensionally; there is still no global classification within which to express depth and distance. This can be seen in the visual arts of the ancient Egyptians, classical antiquity, the Greek-Byzantine era, and the Middle Ages. At a later stage, artists learn to depict geometrical space rationally and coherently by using the Euclidean concept of space (which is not given, *a priori*, but learned). This is the Renaissance perspective, which was based on the static viewpoint of one observer, who looked at the world from a distance, and who organized it, as it was perceived sensorially, into a system of coordinates. By contrast, in the current 'formal-operational stage,' direct reference to the sensory world is no longer made. Instead, 'hypothetical-deductive, logico-mathematical and propositional systems' emerge, which are constructed and manipulated as 'independent relational entities without reference to empirical reality.'¹¹ Space is thus no longer organized from one perspective, that of the observer (as in Cubism). The building stones of reality itself become the object of study (as in Constructivism).

By understanding art in terms of such development, Gablik is able to clarify why two squares by Malevich are more complicated than a detailed picture of a war machine by Leonardo da Vinci.¹² During the twentieth century, art increasingly became a reflection of man's intellectual activity, of his way of observing, feeling, and thinking, independent of the content of those observations, feelings, and thoughts. This transition was clearly visible in the De Stijl movement, and was also reflected in Mondrian's theoretical work, as discussed in chapter five. In the very first issue of the *De Stijl* journal, Mondrian wrote that 'the life of modern cultured man is gradually turning away from the natural: life is becoming more and more *abstract*'; the 'essence of all emotion of plastic beauty' was achieved through abstraction, through the '*exact plastic of pure relationship*.'¹³

Unlike Danto (and Mondrian), Gablik does not view this development as a final stage. We cannot provide ‘a blueprint for the future’ she writes, but

since art now extends beyond objects to a series of conceptual possibilities, alternatives or speculative hypotheses, it would seem, at this point in time, to be infinitely extensible – just as on the evolutionary scale progress takes the form of an ever-increasing diversity and complexity. Since reflective abstraction is potentially an infinite process, there is no need to fear the end of art. [...] Development does not end as a result of achieving structural integration: it is in the nature of open systems that integration and reintegration continue to occur as long as the system exists.¹⁴

This last qualification is wise because there is so little to be said about eternity these days. But, assuming that with ‘system’ Gablik means ‘art,’ she reaches much too far back in her analysis. Egyptian and Greek art played such a different role, figured in such a different context, that it reflects great naïvete – attributable to conceptual realism – to view ‘art’ as a constant immutable phenomenon or as a system extending from antiquity to the present. Moreover, there are many arguments against applying a model of the psychological development of the individual to the history of art, and against assuming developmental laws in history, particularly since Gablik’s idea of cognition is limited.¹⁵

The important aspect of Gablik’s argument is the implication that art develops analogously to knowledge and reflects and creates that knowledge. There appears to be a similar cognitive content in different art forms – in the form of the refinement of perception, an increasing reflection and abstraction, a relativizing of cognitive categorical schemes, and so on. For this argument to be compelling, however, a more accurate idea of the cognitive content of art is required, a perspective that not only applies to all art forms but that also – and no less importantly – allows for the expressive and autonomous nature of art works.

Such an idea can be drawn in part from Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*. There, art as representation, but not as imitation, plays a crucial role. This is because, according to Goodman, representation is not about similarity to or imitation of reality, but about reference to something (*denotation*). That something need not exist or have ever existed: a picture of Pickwick or a unicorn refers, like a picture of Churchill does, but differently. (In such a case, Goodman speaks of *null denotation*.) Thus the picture of the fictitious Pickwick is also the picture of a person – it refers to a class, namely, the class ‘people’ – while, at the same time, that reference is a precondition for the representation. Representation implies not only denotation but also *classification*.¹⁶

The fact that representation is a question more of classification than of imitation, of characterization than of copying, does not mean it is a passive activity. Representation entails actively giving shape. Moreover, *artistic* representation assumes that close relationships are given expression in a specific way, that new elements are added to classes, or that known elements are linked to other classes. At this point, Goodman refers to Gombrich's famous quote from Constable, in which the latter said that painting was a science 'of which pictures are but the experiments.'¹⁷

It is obvious that in representation an artist makes use of conventions and traditions, but at the same time he always creates something new. In this sense, art sheds a different light on the world and contributes to knowledge of reality. When Gertrude Stein complained that Picasso's portrait of her scarcely resembled her, Picasso apparently replied that was not important – that it would come with time.¹⁸ Certain features of Stein's appearance seem to become visible only through Picasso's portrait of her. At the same time, though, reality was altered through the new representation. Through Picasso's intervention, Stein is seen differently from before and is herself changed as a result.

Andy Warhol described how what he saw changed through Pop Art when he drove by car from New York to Los Angeles in 1963: "The farther west we drove, the more Pop everything looked on the highways (...). Pop was everywhere (...). Once you "got" Pop, you could never see a sign the same way again. And once you thought Pop, you could never see America the same way again. The moment you label something, you take a step – I mean, you can never go back again to seeing it unlabeled."¹⁹ Oscar Wilde suggested something similar in his essay 'The Decay of Lying' (1891), through the voice of his protagonist Vivian, namely, that the 'extraordinary change that has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to a particular school of Art.' He was referring to James Whistler's paintings, with their muted vistas of the Thames, which had changed the appearance of the city's climate.²⁰ A similar, hidden Constructivism can be identified in Gablik's cognitive treatment of art, albeit in the much less defensible form of a general model for development.

Such considerations demonstrate that the 'realistic meaning' of art is highly complex and relative. References to reality are determined by a succession of standard representations, which depend on culture, personal circumstance, and the moment in time. The question 'how realistic is representation?', is significant at most only within a specific context, as illustrated earlier through Feyerabend. To give another example: when, in 1310, Giotto depicted the Virgin Mary on a throne in a large-scale format, he was not trying to suggest that she was much bigger than the people around her. She was, however, more important. And this was the reality that, in his day, and in the prevailing tradition of such Mary portraits, was supposed to be depicted. Similarly, when

Shakespeare's *King Lear* begins to rage against a backdrop of thunder and lightning, it would be very strange if someone were to remark how coincidental it was that the storm broke out at the same moment the poor king began to rave. Nor can it be a purely theatrical effect, given that in Elizabethan theatrical conventions, the combining of storm and rage was primarily a realistic expression of the similarity of events in the macrocosm and the microcosm.²¹

In chapter six, it was suggested that art does more than just limit itself to depicting reality; it is also conceptual and contains expression. The conceptual aspect has been discussed at length. But how a work of art *is able to express* something, or rather, the nature of expression, has yet to be dealt with. Goodman is perceptive where this question and its cognitive relevance are concerned. He uses the term 'exemplification' for expression. 'Exemplification' is to symbolize something by referring to it and, at the same time, by adopting several of its qualities relevant within a given context, as in the samples of a tailor's book: the samples refer to materials, and coincide with them in a number of relevant qualities, namely color, pattern, texture, and so on, but, on other counts – such as size, shape, absolute weight, and value – they differ from the materials. In this case, according to Goodman, expression is metaphoric exemplification, whereby he shows how complicated this phenomenon is – because metaphors refer in their own right and according to specific conventions.²²

The point here is not to give an exact description of Goodman's epistemological symbol theory (in his book, more attention is given to that than to the empirical consequences of his theory of art, so that the book's title and subtitle should, in fact, be reversed), but rather to show how Goodman demonstrates the semantic weight of the concept of 'expression' that is so crucial to the arts, while, at the same time, successfully avoiding several of the pitfalls of traditional theories of expression, for example, those of Croce, Collingwood, and Dewey. (Among them are the problem of who or what expresses or experiences something – the artist, the work itself, the listener, the reader, or the viewer; which aspects of the art work evoke or contain feelings and the like; how this happens.) Goodman argues that symbolization in art, in the form of both representation and expression, is a cognitive phenomenon *par excellence*. Although the classic dichotomy between the cognitive and the emotive – and thus between science and art – has often prevented us from seeing this, the two kinds of experience are closely related.²³

Goodman's treatment makes the cognitive value of art visible without dismissing its highly important expressive or emotional component. The driving force behind art is curiosity, the urge to know; aesthetic satisfaction consists in the first place of gaining new insights and experiences, of acquiring knowledge, though not in a purely discursive sense. It is from this that (symbolization in) art also derives its value:

[...] by the delicacy of its discriminations and the aptness of its allusions; by the way it works in grasping, exploring, and informing the world; by how it analyzes, sorts, orders, and organizes; by how it participates in the making, manipulation, retention, and transformation of knowledge. Considerations of simplicity and subtlety, power and precision, scope and selectivity, familiarity and freshness, are all relevant and often contend with one another; their weighting is relative to our interests, our information, and our inquiry.²⁴

It is this profusion of cognitive – that is, of intellectual, sensual, and emotional – activities that is brought into play in art and that makes progress in the different arts possible. And not only does it make it possible, but, through this cognitive quality, it guarantees it.

Although the cognitive value of art has never been undisputed since Romanticism, the idea has a respectable tradition, including in twentieth-century philosophy, for example, in the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Benjamin), the hermeneutic school (Gadamer), and the school focusing on moral thought (Nussbaum). Building on this tradition, I am not claiming here that man always learns something from art, but that this is often the case, and that it is a good thing. I am therefore making a normative proposition, which allows me to replace the neutral concept of development with the concept of progress.²⁵

A claim to such progress in the arts may become more convincing when some degree of order is applied to these pluriform and wide-reaching cognitive experiences. The question that might then be relevant is, which merits or functions might be ascribed to art. Some may find this a trivial question. Others may even find it inadmissible, because of the presumed disinterestedness of art, which escapes such questions in the aesthetic tradition. Yet such propositions are facile, if not naïve, as demonstrated by the following, partly in accordance with Goodman's *Languages of Art*.

In the first place, art can be seen as an exercising of our symbolic powers, a training that better prepares us for dealing with contingencies, with unexpected situations of any kind. A form of gymnastics, Goodman calls it, with paintings and symphonies as the barbells and punching bags with which we strengthen our 'intellectual muscles.'²⁶ An example – as a true philosopher, Goodman uses them sparingly – is Luis Buñuel's *The Phantom of Liberty* (1974), a film that treats the viewer to a series of absurd, completely unexpected scenes, as compelling as they are breathtaking, so that the viewer leaves the cinema having experienced something new. Likewise, the reader of *Madame Bovary* will probably be no better equipped to handle a confrontation with adultery or deadly boredom in reality, but she or he may be somewhat less intimidated by the unfamiliarity of the phenomenon. Furthermore, someone who listens to the fugues and preludes of Bach's *Well-Tempered Klavier* (1722) may expand his patterns of expectation in musical structure,

through some of the unexpected – or unexpectedly quick – modulations (which, to be thoroughly speculative, might in principle even have a counterpart in an increasing mathematical or logical flexibility in the cognitive faculty of the listener). In contemporary poetry, such artistic acrobatics are more or less taken for granted: words and expressions have an ambiguous function which shifts the usual meanings, if only by fractions. Someone who looks at paintings by Mondrian, van der Leek, Huszár, or van Doesburg might also have such a new experience. Even without embracing the far-reaching intentions of their work, it is possible to develop a greater sensitivity for spatial division and color relationships by looking at them.

A second merit of art lies in the quality long ascribed to it of *delectare* – the pleasure that can be derived from it as a game. As dogs bark, so people make art, is how Goodman puts it – because they cannot refrain from it, and because it is so much fun. But the same cognitive driving force underlies even this more lighthearted approach, albeit not so much in terms of a salutary exercise as of a spontaneous impulse, of a curiosity about new possibilities within the context of a number of (often unwritten) rules, and the satisfaction of having discovered and explored these possibilities. The famous jazz improvisation techniques of John Coltrane and Chet Baker come to mind, along with van Doesburg's interiors and much twentieth-century poetry. Poetry realizes new possibilities of language, and in doing so, enlarges language's cognitive richness, however subtly.²⁷

A third way that the cognitive relevance of art manifests itself is when art is viewed as a system of social codes. Countless works of art contain information and messages from a social discourse. Moral and cultural codes, as well as dilemmas, can often be concisely propagated in art or, conversely, questioned – in film, literature, theater, and, to a lesser degree, other art forms. In this way, the work of the De Stijl movement (and of the Futurists) gave a new impulse to the appreciation of technology and machines, thereby undermining the often aesthetically inspired objections to the development of a technological culture. The numerous debates about politically correct content in literature and theater that have taken place during the past decade – in and through the art works themselves – are examples of how art can teach us something about social codes. Moreover, different art forms can provide information and promote understanding about the beliefs, customs, and religious or non-religious presuppositions of other social groups. Thus, Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* provides an exceptionally moving view of the social interaction and change that can accompany cultural integration and confrontation, including the many problems that arise during the various processes of mutual adjustment. In such art forms, *criticism* plays an important role: ethically, for example, in plays by Calderón or Shakespeare; politically, in various genres by Brecht; socially, in novels by Charles Dickens; socio-philosophically,

in books by Sartre; moral-historically, in Claude Lanzmann's documentary film *Shoah*; and so on. Furthermore, one might mention the importance of discussions on aesthetic judgment, of arguments on something as relative (but not irrelevant, for purposes of social distinction) as training in cultural and moral debates, and of disputes about aesthetic values as preparation for social interaction and political discourse.²⁸

Finally, art offers a specific kind of knowledge acquisition: that is, it does more than just exercise cognitive abilities. This specific form of acquisition partly coincides with art as a game and art as social discourse. In other words, art offers possibilities for storing knowledge symbolically, for describing new psychological experiences, for registering historical events, for more subtle sensory experiences, and so on. Such knowledge acquisition operates on the assumption that art reveals something that cannot be said or described in any other way. Whether one thinks of a historical novel in this context or of an abstract painting, a poem, a piece of music, a ballet, or a film, in each case something is shown or highlighted through the use of symbols that could not have been expressed or described otherwise with the same nuance, precision, clarity, or, possibly, ambivalence.²⁹ Countless techniques and procedures – from the interior monologue to the close-up, from the computer-produced musical composition to the pointillist painting technique, from the color manipulation in video art to the rhymeless sonnet – provide the opportunity of acquiring specific knowledge or organizing it in a new way.

Although art is not exclusively a cognitive phenomenon, the above demonstrates the importance of its cognitive nature. Cognitive progress can occur in endless variations with different accents and manifestations in the different branches of the arts, thus serving to enrich reality. We now have some idea of how complex this cognitive process can be. Whereas knowledge, particularly in the philosophical context, is normally considered a more or less coherent phenomenon, art's cognitive extension to human knowledge seems to fall outside this systematic view of cognition. This is not so much because of the simplifying dichotomy of the intellectual versus the emotional, but because of its opposition to the equally classical dictum *clara et distincta*. The moment that knowledge can easily be localized, subsumed in a system, or adequately described in a scientific, practical, or technological way, it is no longer of interest to the arts. Hence, the vagueness – barely concealed in the examples above – with which the nature of this knowledge has been described, and hence the fact that these examples might equally well have been classified differently.

My main purpose here, however, has been to highlight the importance of the cognitive element in the arts, and to show why it is that one can speak of progress in this context. It is important to have clarity about the nature of the process being interpreted in terms of progress, and thus about the branch of art involved and the particular period the process is affecting. In chapter one,

the argument was put forward of the pointlessness of allowing the duration of such processes to extend beyond several centuries – and even that may be too long, given that several crucial ideas about the nature of art only emerged during Romanticism.

Progress as regulative principle

The different forms of progress in the arts that have been defended here do not imply that periodization can be maintained. Indeed, while in chapter four it was shown that the original concept of the ‘periodizing museum’ has scarcely been disavowed even to the present day, the new wings of museums do accommodate exceptionally flexible exhibition spaces. This, of course, must be seen in conjunction with what Susan Sontag described as the ‘acceleration of periods.’ These increasingly short periods lose their relative weight, and thus, in a certain sense, affect the whole historical concept of time, as suggested earlier with reference to Koselleck.

History may not have ended but periodization does seem to have had its day (although such a statement remains speculative). One can hardly deny that historical categories like ‘progress’ and ‘period’ have lost some of their metaphysical weight, in the same way as the ordering ability of the collective singular (*Kollektivsingular*) has lost its significance where historical concepts are concerned. Viewed in this way, time plays a much more limited role than it once did, for example, during the Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace. The same difference can also be observed between the De Stijl movement and later avant-garde movements. During the Victorian era, historical categories such as the spirit of the age, necessary development, and evolution occupied a prominent place, while, with the avant-garde artists from the 1960s onward, the accent came to lie more on the *experimental* nature of their undertakings than on the inevitable development of art in general.

To speak of progress in art may be no more than a historical simplification. By now, however, we may at least conclude that it is not an *idée fixe*, not merely a figment of the imagination of someone nostalgic for the nineteenth century. First and foremost, the observation signifies a legitimization of the many forms of historical writing and historicizing art criticism that we seem to have been unable to take seriously since postmodernism. Not that art is becoming increasingly beautiful (increasingly better, and so on), but, insofar as it is a coherent process, it does demonstrate accumulation and continuity, and this development is considered desirable. Whoever denies this will have no difficulty in destroying existing works of art, or in denying the cognitive value of art – or, if nothing else, in valuing it negatively.

The concept of progress facilitates a meaningful approach to the present.

In principle, it enables the artist and the observer (the listener or viewer) to make choices from the – in itself – endless number of possibilities. The very possibility of progress creates a pattern in the cacophony of the present. The question of whether a work of art adds something to history is still not a useless one – as long as it remains free of modernistic pedantry and avant-gardist dogmatism, both of which adopted a faith in one path as their credo. Such historicizing discrimination about what is and what is not acceptable is even a precondition for a flourishing art practice. Without the bedding of criticism or the normative positioning of time, anything goes. And where anything goes, nothing more is possible.

The preference that is expressed here, for such a historical orientation, in some ways resembles the middle road between nominalism and realism in the history of ideas that I advocated in chapter one. Just as the realism of eternal, immutable ideas was discounted there as naïve, and radical nominalism proved fruitless, likewise, with the middle road as the point of departure, the speculative idea of eternal progress was quickly pushed aside – but without rejecting, to the fanfare of postmodernism, all ideas of progress as outdated. Such a rejection would be paradoxical anyway because it presupposes notions of progress.

Ideas concerning progress in art, the conviction that today's art manifests itself in the context of a not entirely random process, in practices that allow what is created and judged to be situated within our time – such notions give us the opportunity to oppose what has become a rather lifeless art discourse, one that continually denies such ideas to the steady rhythm of pluralism's posthistoric drums. At first glance, this pluralism seems to offer a breath of fresh air, an escape from the historical laws with which the avant-garde's ideology of progress saddled art for so long. Change still exists, but the strait-jacket of historical development does not: what remains is the combining and re-combining of well-known forms. Arthur Danto's defense of such pluralism – a bit ironic and thus not always equally unambiguous – refers to Hegel's disciple Kojève, according to whom the end of history only signifies the end of the active role of history, war, and bloody revolutions. But art, love, and play, all those things that make man happy, continue to exist in this perspective. In Marx's communistic, posthistoric Utopia without alienation and the division of labor, man could be a hunter in the morning, a fisherman in the afternoon, and a critical critic in the evening. Likewise, according to Danto, in the current artistic utopia of pluralism, 'one could be an Abstractionist in the morning, an Expressionist in the afternoon, a Photorealist in the evening – and write art criticism after dinner.'³⁰ According to this *after-dinner* philosophy, you can cut out paper dolls 'or do what you damned please.'³¹ In such a climate of disinterest-based tolerance, what is made or said no longer seems relevant. The radical freedom of the 'anything goes' approach that emanates from today's

pluralism has almost the same paralyzing effect on art as the kind of freedom to which Sartre said we were condemned.

People can become resigned to this posthistoric paralysis, which Danto formulated so clearly for the visual arts and which manifests itself equally obstinately in most art forms. There are, however, remedies for this fatigue in the postmodern discourse – one of which is the assumption of progress in art. It was even a persistent cliché during the peak years of the avant-garde, before being subsequently relegated to history partly on theoretical grounds, even though, as argued above, this was unjustified. The time has come for it to be dusted off again, not because some clichés make more sense than others, but because it offers an antidote to the laboriousness of what many experienced as the great psychological barrier of moving into the new millennium.

In the vital debate on aesthetic values, progress is a classic means of orientation. Aesthetic values can be contested in part through ideas of progress. By attempting to describe a state of affairs in a specific art form and to situate it in the present, by trying to understand why something gets made one way and not another, valid criticism becomes possible and artistic quality will continue to be guaranteed. A specific way of working is never random or unaffected by its time. Wittgenstein indirectly addressed this issue in a discussion of the context-dependence of concepts. Compare a concept with a style of painting, he wrote in *Philosophical Investigations*. Is that style of painting, the Egyptian, for example, arbitrary? ‘Is it,’ he asked himself equally rhetorically, ‘a mere question of pleasing and ugly?’³²

To the artist, critic, and viewer (the listener or reader), some notion of progress is indispensable, in the sense of the Kantian regulative principle.³³ This programmatic dimension of the concept of progress is ultimately more important than the question of to what extent talking in terms of progress can be justified. What for Kant was the primacy of practical reason, amounts to the same thing as the primacy of art criticism in the present book. A belief in progress stimulates originality and enables the discovery of new opportunities. It is precisely the ideas of the power of the imagination that flourished during the eighteenth century and of the ‘essentially imperfectable’ that emerged during Romanticism, both of which have been described here as so fruitful for the arts, that find their most important vehicle in historical intimations of progress.

Naturally, such progress no longer has much to do with the universal, monolithic eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ideas of progress. But it would seem preferable to the deceptively modest claim that the end of history, art, and progress has been reached. For there, too, under the frivolous façade of relativism and irony lurk notions of decline and decay, which are just as oppressive as the disorientation of the man from the provinces who visited ancient Rome for the first time and could only observe that it was full of build-

ings that would last forever. What else could the world possibly need? This image is taken from the now almost-forgotten Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, who contrasted it with the image of 'the noisy joy of children let loose from school.' We do not know, he continued, in this passage from *The Revolt of the Masses*, 'what is going to happen tomorrow in our world, and this causes us a secret joy; because that very impossibility of foresight, that horizon ever open to all contingencies, constitute [sic] authentic life, the true fullness of our existence.'³⁴

People may or may not regret this, but these words have become too pathetic for the first years of the twenty-first century. What remains is the *reculer pour mieux sauter* that has echoed throughout this book. Moving one step back from the claims that the belief in progress once made, seemed inevitable. Moving one step forward became possible by reinstating this belief in a limited, reasoned form of progress. One step back because the idea of increasing artistic quality turned out to be a myth. One small step forward through the prospect of cognitive growth. In the face of an open and unpredictable future, these tiny dance steps may not seem very significant, but they do at least reveal movement, in comparison with the self-satisfied air of calm that seems to have crept into art, along with Hegelian finalism and relativizing postmodernism.

Notes

Introduction

- 1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen/Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe, R. Rhees, Oxford 1953: 7-22 (21). See also P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Understanding and Meaning: An Analytical Commentary on the 'Philosophical Investigations'*, Oxford 1980: 16-18.
- 2 See, e.g., M. Mandelbaum, *History, Man and Reason: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, London/Baltimore 1974: 369-70; Sydney Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*, London 1968: 145-46; W. Warren Wagar, *Good Tidings: The Belief in Progress from Darwin to Marcuse*, Bloomington/London 1972: 145ff.
- 3 Gerard Reve, *Zelf schrijver worden*, Albert Verwey Lectures 1985, Leiden 1986: 78.
- 4 Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, London 1973: 229-30 (or. *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt am Main 1947).
- 5 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massami, Manchester 1984 (or. *La condition postmoderne*, Paris 1979).
- 6 Arthur C. Danto, 'The End of Art,' in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, New York, 1986: 81-115; esp. the last essay in the book, 'Art, Evolution, and the Consciousness of History' (187-210). See also the 'Introduction' to his *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-historical Perspective*, New York 1992, and the essay therein entitled 'Learning to Live with Pluralism,' 3-12, 217-31; 'Introduction' and 'Art After the End of Art' in Danto, *Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations*, New York 1994: 3-14, 321-33; and a more sophisticated analysis in Danto, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*, Princeton 1997: 3-60, 193-217.
- 7 Danto 1986: 86-101, cf. 198-200. Danto 1997 further qualifies this opinion. Here he virtually equates the second model with the history of modernism, while at the same time not excluding the possibility of progress with respect to the narrative of expression. Moreover, the history of modernism now also becomes a history of increasing reflection on the question of what art is. See Danto 1997: 62-67.
- 8 Danto 1986: 101-4, 106-7.
- 9 Danto 1986: 110-15, 204-10; Danto 1992: 4ff. Cf. Danto 1997: 30ff., 42ff., 117-33, 194ff.

I Perspectives on Progress: A History

- 1 Quoted in U. Haltern, *Die Londoner Weltausstellung von 1851*, Munster 1971: 169.
- 2 Quoted in Haltern 1971: 351.
- 3 J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into Its Origin and Growth*, New York 1955. Other frequently cited historical surveys are: John Baillie, *The Belief in Progress*, Oxford 1950; Jules Delvaille, *Essai sur l'histoire de l'idée de progrès*, Paris 1910; Morris Ginsberg, *The Idea of Progress: A Revaluation*, London 1953; Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*, New York 1980; Sydney Pollard, *The Idea of Progress*, London 1968; Joachim Ritter, 'Fortschritt,' in *Ibid.* (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 2, Basel/Stuttgart 1972: 1032-59; R.V. Sampson, *Progress in the Age of Reason: The Seventeenth Century to the Present Day*, London 1956.

- 4 See H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, London 1951. Butterfield characterizes this 'Whig interpretation' as 'the tendency in many historians [...] to emphasize certain principles of progress in the past and to produce a story which is the ratification if not the glorification of the present' (Preface, v). In such cases, Mandelbaum speaks of a 'retrospective fallacy'; see Mandelbaum 1974: 129, 134ff.
- 5 Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,' in *History and Theory* 8, 1969: 3-53 (7-16). From Skinner's point of view, for example, it would be questionable whether what Ritter calls Cicero's *progressio admirabilis* (admirable progress) in his article 'Fortschritt,' through which he refers to the period after the despots, has much to do with the modern idea of progress (Ritter 1972: 1032). Although there is a difference between a *Begriffsgeschichte* (history of concepts), in which a concept is traced over the centuries as a word - Ritter did, after all, make a *Wörterbuch* (dictionary) - and an *Ideengeschichte* (history of ideas), in which the history of ideas and opinions is central, ultimately the meaning of such a *Begriffsgeschichte* is based on the realistic intuition that words refer to a specific, stable core. Skinner's criticism would also be applicable *a fortiori* to Nisbet's interpretation of Greek thinkers, because Nisbet effortlessly catapults them into the role of prophets of progress. To do so, Nisbet strips Plato's world of immutable ideas of any importance, subsequently argues *en passant* in favor of several interpretations of Plato simultaneously, and eventually drags in several short passages - mostly from the third book of *The Laws* - that suit his purpose (Nisbet 1980: 27-32). Cf. also E.R. Dodds, 'Progress in Classical Antiquity,' in P.P. Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. 3, New York 1973: 629; L. Edelstein, *The Idea of Progress in Classical Antiquity*, Baltimore 1967: 102-18.
- 6 Skinner 1969: 10. These words are taken from the beginning of Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being* (1936).
- 7 Bury 1955: 37-38. To cite another example: Nisbet nonchalantly views the contrast between the earthly and heavenly cities of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, as the motor of change and development, as the forerunner of Marx's concept of 'class struggle,' Darwin's struggle for life, and Hegel's dialectic; see Nisbet 1980: 71-72.
- 8 'Historicism' has at least two meanings in English. The first refers to the tendency to view history as a systematic process which was the predominant view during the nineteenth and part of the twentieth centuries, later contested by Karl Popper for ideological reasons in *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957) and by Lyotard, among others. The second refers to the tendency in history to study not the process but a period or moment as an independent given (the German 'Historismus'). Skinner is a modern proponent of this form.

In the discussion that followed the publication of this article, Skinner defended a more sophisticated position. For a critique of this position, see B. Parekh and R. Berki, 'The History of Political Ideas,' in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973): 163-84, and Peter L. Janssen, 'Political Thought as Traditional Action: The Critical Response to Skinner and Pocock,' in *History and Theory* 24 (1985): 115-46. Skinner limited himself primarily to political philosophy and its history. I refrain here from mentioning his confusing terminological distinction in this context, between 'textualism' and 'contextualism.' Richard Rorty gives a clear account and division of the history of ideas in 'The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres,' in *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, R. Rorty, J.B. Schneewind, Q. Skinner (eds.), Cambridge 1984: 49-75.

- 9 Cf. Janssen 1985: 144-45.
- 10 Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Political Thought*, vols. 1 and 2, Cambridge 1978. Insofar as the picture is not fragmented, it is precisely because of such global concepts as 'the modern state,' which can easily be considered one of Skinner's own 'historical absurdities' (ix-x).

- 11 Translated from M. Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, Paris 1973 (1971): 57.
- 12 For a more detailed criticism of Foucault's history or 'archeology' of ideas, see J.G. Merquior, *Foucault*, London 1985: 57-72, 78-83, 144-46. A more sophisticated approach of the representability of the past can be found in chapter two of Ann Rigney's *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism*, Ithaca/London 2001.
- 13 O. Brunner, W. Conze, R. Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, Stuttgart, 1972ff.
- 14 From Skinner's point of view, the criticism (to limit ourselves to the *Fortschritt* entry in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, 1975: 351-423) is particularly relevant in relation to antiquity (353-63). In one passage, by C. Meier, it is particularly striking how often the author says that something is not (yet) the case (356-58). Even Koselleck can be criticized on this count (368), but they are exceptions that do not undermine his argument.
- 15 R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Frankfurt am Main 1979: 17-37.
- 16 Koselleck 1979: 12-14.
- 17 For the remainder of point one, see Koselleck 1979: 19-34, 315, 361-62, and Koselleck 1975: 367-71.
- 18 Koselleck 1979: 27; cf. P. Hazard, *The European Mind: 1680-1715*, vol. 2, ch. 2, London 1953 (trans. J. Lewis May, or. *La crise de la conscience européenne 1680-1715*, Paris 1935).
- 19 See, for this, Koselleck 1979: 126, 132ff., 323ff., 336, and Koselleck 1975: 391-402.
- 20 'Das eigentliche Problem der Geschichte ist die Ungleichheit der Fortschritte in den verschiedenen Bestandteilen der gesamten menschlichen Bildung, besonders die grosse Divergenz in dem Grade der intellektuellen und der moralischen Bildung.' Quoted in Koselleck 1975: 391.
- 21 I. Kant, 'Idea for a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view,' in I. Kant, *On History*, ed. Lewis White Beck, trans. Lewis White Beck, et al., New York 1963: 11-26 (21) (or. *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in Weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, 1784, Akademie-Ausgabe, vol. 8: 26).
- 22 See Koselleck 1979: 47-56, 32ff.; Koselleck 1975: 384-90.
- 23 In Germany, the singular 'Fortschritt' was used in 1754 in a theoretical sense by the pre-critical Kant. But, as a collective singular term, under which a myriad of forms of progress could be understood, it appeared only at the end of the eighteenth century (Koselleck 1975: 381; cf. Ritter 1972, 1052). However, the use of the singular form does occur earlier in other contexts; in England, for example, in the title of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) and in John Donne's (1572-1631) poem 'The Progress of the Soul.'
- 24 Koselleck 1979: 349-75.
- 25 Koselleck 1979: 339-48; Koselleck 1975: 389, 398ff., 407ff.
- 26 Koselleck 1979: 341.
- 27 Koselleck 1975: 407.
- 28 David E. Leary, 'Michel Foucault, an historian of the Sciences Humaines,' in *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 12, 1976: 293 (quoted in Merquior 1985: 145).
- 29 Cf. Mandelbaum 1974: 42.
- 30 W. Wieland, 'Entwicklung, Evolution,' in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, 1972: 199-228, esp. 207. Wieland's article describes the history of the word *Entwicklung* and, marginally, of the word *Evolution*, primarily in the German context, up to the second part of the nineteenth century (Marx).
- 31 Paul H. Barrett and R.B. Freeman (eds.), *The Works of Charles Darwin*, vol. 16, *The Origin of Species*, London 1988: 446-47.

- 32 Cf. Laeyendecker 1986: 28-30. For several other descriptions and definitions, see, in addition to Bury, Theodor W. Adorno, 'Fortschritt,' in *Eingriffe. Neun kritische Modellen*, Frankfurt am Main 1963: 11-29 (11); Baillie 1951, 2; C. van Doren, *The Idea of Progress*, New York/Washington/London 1967: 3; Wagar 1972: 3ff.
- 33 H.U. Gumbrecht, 'Modern,' in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, vol. 4, 1978: 93-131, esp. 126. 'Modernization' became current in scholarly literature in the 1950s. See idem, 'Das Zeitbewusstsein der Moderne und ihre Bedürfnis nach Selbstvergewisserung,' in J. Habermas, *Der Philosophische Diskurs der Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main 1986: 10. See, also, H.R. Jauss, 'Literarische Tradition und gegenwärtiges Bewusstsein der Modernität,' in idem, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation*, Frankfurt am Main 1970: 11ff.

2 From the Ancients and the Moderns: A Door to the Future

- 1 René Wellek, 'Evolution of literature,' in P.P. Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. 2, New York, 1973: 169-74 (169). The text is not a literal quotation from Aristotle; see the latter's *Poetica*, ch. 4, 1449a.
- 2 Cf. E.R. Dodds, 'Progress in Classical Antiquity,' in P.P. Wiener (ed.), *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. 3, New York 1973: 623-33 (629); Thomas Munro, *Evolution in the Arts*, Cleveland, n.d., 38.
- 3 Ritter 1972: 1033; see also Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, ch. 1: 7 (1098a), lines 20-21.
- 4 Bury 1955: chs. 4 and 5; P.B.M. Blaas, *Anachronisme en historisch besef. Momenten uit de ontwikkeling van het Europees historisch bewustzijn*, Amsterdam 1988: 11, cf. 20.
- 5 For an account of the Querelle, see, in addition to Bury, A. Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIe siècle*, Paris 1948-56, vol. 3 (125-31), vol. 5 (80-84); Hans Baron, 'The Querelle of the Ancients and the Moderns as a Problem for Renaissance Scholarship,' in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959): 3-22; J. Dagen, *L'histoire de l'esprit humain dans la pensée française. De Fontenelle à Condorcet*, Paris 1980: 109-60; M. Fumaroli, 'Les abeilles et les araignées,' in A.-M. Lecoq (ed.), *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, Paris 2001: 7-218; H. Gillot, *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes en France*, Geneva 1968 (1914); Hazard 1953: vol. 1, ch. 2; H.R. Jauss, 'Ursprung und Bedeutung der Fortschrittsidee in der Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes,' in Kuhn, Wiedmann, 51-72 (hereafter referred to as Jauss 1964a); Hans Robert Jauss, 'Ästhetische Normen und geschichtliche Reflexion in der "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes",' in Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui regarde les arts et les sciences*, Munich 1964: 8-64 ('Einleitung'), hereafter referred to as Jauss 1964b; H. Kortum, *Charles Perrault und Nicolas Boileau. Der Antike-Streit im Zeitalter der klassischen französischen Literatur*, Berlin 1966; W. Kraus, *Studien zur deutschen und französischen Aufklärung*, Berlin 1963; Henri Rigault, *Histoire de la querelle des anciens et des modernes*, Paris 1856.
- 6 'Good Antiquity has always been venerable, / But I never believed it should be adored. / I see the Ancients without kneeling in tribute, / They are great, it is true, but people, just like us' (Perrault, 165, 1). For the hypothesis that Perrault's famous fairytales should be read in light of the Querelle, see Jeanne Morgan, *Perrault's Morals for Moderns*, New York 1985.
- 7 First quotation: 'You will always see me work in the following way: / My imitation is not servility. / I am only using the idea, and the techniques, and the rules / that our masters themselves once used.' Second quotation: 'I praise it, and I know it is not without merit; / But next to these great names, there is little glory for us.' See Rigault 1856: 145ff.
- 8 Bury 1955: 79ff., first in Rigault 1856: 69-76. For a critique of this, Jauss 1964b: 34, n. 68. Cf. Fumaroli 2001: 52-91.

- 9 'And without fear of injustice, Louis's Age / can be compared with the beautiful Age of Augustus' (Perrault, 165, I). The Age of Emperor Augustus (27 B.C.-A.D. 14) also served as the standard of the self-confident (or self-important) neo-classicism of the early decades of the eighteenth century in England, which, after all, were then and are now characterized as the Augustan Age.
- 10 Perrault, 187, 340 (I), 438ff. The *Parallèle* offers numerous examples that warrant discussion.
- 11 'We conclude, if you agree, that in all the Arts and all the sciences, with the exception of Eloquence and Poetry, the Moderns are far superior to the Ancients, as I believe I have demonstrated sufficiently. And, to keep the peace, let us decide nothing here with regard to Eloquence and Poetry, although there is no reason at all to judge differently in this case.' Quoted in Jauss 1964b: 46-47. 'Keeping the peace' is probably a reference to the truce engineered by the octogenerian Arnauld between Boileau and Perrault, who had been in vehement conflict with each other for years about many things, including this point. In addition to Jauss 1964b: 46-7, see H. Gillot 1968: 486-87; Kortum 1966 (et passim), and Rigault 1856: 357ff.
- 12 'Ultimately, the entire struggle of the Ancients and the Moderns to achieve the greatest excellence can be reduced to no more than the desire to know whether the trees that once grew in nature were bigger than those that grow now.' Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes & Digression sur les anciens et les modernes*, ed. Robert Shackleton, Oxford 1955 (1686/1688). Cf. C. Frankel, *The Faith of Reason: The Idea of Progress in the French Enlightenment*, New York 1948: 103-06, and Fumaroli 2001: 184ff.
- 13 Rigault 1856: 303ff.; Bury 1955: 120-23. For an extensive description of the English Querelle, see J.M. Levine, *The Battle of Books*, Ithaca/London 1991.
- 14 *A Full and True Account of the Battle Fought last Friday Between the Antient and the Modern Books in St. James's Library*, London 1704 (but written around 1697); published in one volume with *A Tale of a Tub*, H.J. Real (ed.), Berlin/New York 1978.
- 15 Swift 1978: 16. For the context of *The Battle of the Books*, see Real's introduction, esp. xvii-xxv, and J. Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, his Works, and the Age*, London 1963, vol. 1 (226-37). Ehrenpreis's comment (226) that Swift's document is no 'chapter in the history of ideas' is correct, but it leaves intact the notion that it beautifully reflects the stubborn rivalry between antiquity and the modern era.
- 16 'My century had gods too bizarre, / Heroes depraved by conceit, / And outrageously niggardly kings, / Failings which used to be respected.' Quoted in Rigault 1856: 370, who, incidentally, cites the end of 1713 as the date of publication of *Discours sur Homère* (369).
- 17 Fontenelle 1955: 172.
- 18 He literally says the following about antiquity: 'Illa enim aetas, respectu nostri antiqua et major, respectu mundi ipsius nova et minor fuit' (I, 84). Quoted in Koselleck 1975: 372; cf. Bury 1955: 56-58.
- 19 Bury 1955: 125. Because of his position in the Querelle, Fontenelle is continually cast in the role of the apostle of progress, after which historians are amazed when he turns out to be different from the way he looks. See, for example, P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, London 1966, vol. I: 'And yet this urbane literary man, this admirer of modernity, who anticipated the philosophes in so much of his work, was not a philosophe in his heart: he never made the leap to naturalism, whether it be the deism of Voltaire, the atheism of Holbach, or the scepticism of Hume; he remained, with the century in which he was born, a tolerant, cultivated, firmly committed Christian' (318).
- 20 A. Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, 47th lesson; quoted in Rigault 1856: 561-62.
- 21 Hazard 1990: 52ff.

- 22 Also noteworthy is P.O. Kristeller, 'The Modern System of the Arts,' in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951), and the summary of the discussion of Jauss's viewpoint in Kuhn, Wiedmann 1964: 305ff.
- 23 For the above, see Jauss 1964b: 12ff. Jauss points out that the word 'progress' occurs only once in Fontenelle's *Digression*, and that for processes of progression or progress the word 'perfection' is used (16). Perrault, too, lacks an historical 'awareness of progress'; he claimed, for example, that the history of mankind could (possibly) decline again after the peak attained in his own day. See Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literarische Tradition und gegenwärtiges Bewusstsein der Modernität,' in Jauss 1970: 11-66 (31).
- 24 Jauss 1964b: 47ff.
- 25 Perrault, 138-39 (I), quoted in Jauss 1964b: 55.
- 26 For a similar change in eighteenth-century Germany, see H. Madland, 'Imitation to Creation: The Changing Concept of Mimesis from Bodmer and Breitinger to Lenz,' in *Eighteenth-Century German Authors and their Aesthetic Theories: Literature and the Other Arts*, R. Critchfield, W. Koepke (ed.), Columbia, SC 1988: 29-43.
- 27 Hazard 1990: 365-67.
- 28 Cf. Jauss 1964a: 62-64; Jauss 1964b: 22, 43, 57.
- 29 Voltaire, 'Le siècle de Louis XIV,' in *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, ed. R. Petit, Paris, 1972: 88, 90. Cf. H. Vyverberg, *Historical Pessimism in the French Enlightenment*, Cambridge, Mass. 1958: 170ff.
- 30 Cf. Maurice Cranston, *The Romantic Movement*, Oxford, U.K./Cambridge, Mass. 1995: 48-49.
- 31 See Wellek 1973: 170.
- 32 G.W.F. Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe in zwanzig Bänden*, H. Glockner (ed.), Stuttgart 1927, vol. 12 (403-06). Hegel's periodization of art and his views on development in art represent the primary focus of the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (vols. 12-14).
- 33 Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Die Stellung der Poesie im System der Hegelschen Ästhetik und die Frage des Vergangenheitscharakters der Kunst,' in A. Gethmann-Siefert and O. Pöggeler, *Werk und Wirkung von Hegels Ästhetik*, Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 27, Bonn 1986: 212-23.
- 34 Gadamer 1986: 223. Hegel's admiration for classical (Greek) art, which can be seen as a variation of the Ancients' or (the classicist) Winckelmann's admiration for antiquity, played an important role in the development of his *Ästhetik*. With it, a serious discrepancy between the classicist ideal and the interpretation of later and contemporary art already seems to become ingrained in his aesthetic system. For this problem and for a defense against the reproach that Hegel attempts 'to create a diluted [...] ideal of Beauty based on the ancient Greeks,' see A. Gethmann-Siefert, *Die Funktion der Kunst in der Geschichte. Untersuchungen zu Hegels Ästhetik*, Hegel-Studien, Beiheft 25, Bonn 1984, especially 145ff., 229-30, 269-70, 286ff. Cf. W. Oelmüller, 'Hegels Satz vom Ende der Kunst und das Problem der Philosophie der Kunst nach Hegel,' in *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 73 (1965): 75-94, and Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. by Michael Shaw, foreword by Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Minneapolis 1984: 92-94.
- 35 J.A.N.C. Marquis de Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, completed in 1793, published posthumously in 1795 (Eng.: *Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind*, New York 1796). On progress in Condorcet, see Vyverberg 1958: 66-71, and Ira O. Wade, *The Structure and Form of the French Enlightenment*, vol 2: *Esprit Révolutionnaire*, Princeton 1977: 373-87.
- 36 Condorcet, *Outlines of an Historical View*, 1971: 10. The singular form appears much earlier in France: Pascal, for example, used it in the introduction to his *Traité du vide*

(1647), in which he continually emphasizes advancements in the field of knowledge: '[...] tous les homes ensemble y font un continuel progres à mesure que l'univers vieillit'; cited in Koselleck 1975: 372; cf. ch. 1, note 23.

37 Condorcet, *Esquisse* 1971: 77, 269; cf. Koselleck 1975: 377-78.

38 Condorcet, *Outlines of an Historical View*, 80.

39 Condorcet, *Esquisse* 1971: 167-68, 174.

40 Condorcet, *Esquisse* 1971: 245-57, 268, 276-77.

41 Condorcet, *Esquisse* 1971: 246. Cf. for this aspect of *geschichtliche Zeit*, F. Schlegel's critique of Condorcet's *Esquisse* 1971: cited in Koselleck 1975: 391.

3 From Romanticism to the Avant-Garde

1 John Keats, in Lamia, quoted in M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, Oxford/London 1971a: 307; for these issues, see 303-26.

2 René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, New Haven/London 1955, passim, vol. 2: *The Romantic Age*, 1965: 291-92.

3 'Où va-t-il, ce navire? Il va, de jour vêtu, / A l'avenir divin et pur, à la vertu, / A la science qu'on voit luire, / A la mort des fléaux, à l'oubli généreux, / A l'abondance, au calme, au rire, à l'homme heureux; / Il va, ce glorieux navire, / Au droit, à la raison, à la fraternité, / A la religieuse et sainte vérité / Sans impostures et sans voiles, / A l'amour, sur les coeurs serrant son doux lien, / Au juste, au grand, au bon, au beau... - Vous voyez bien / Qu'en effet il monte aux étoiles!' Victor Hugo, *La légende des siècles*, Paris 1950 (1859/1883): 728-29.

4 M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, New York/London 1971b: 62-63.

5 See, for example, Wagar 1972: 18; cf. Munro, n.d.: 46.

6 Quoted in Munro, n.d.: 147.

7 For the foregoing interpretation, see primarily Munro, n.d.: 52ff. For Comte's then growing interest in literature and its role in propaganda, see W. Lepenies, *Die drei Kulturen. Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft*, Munich/Vienna 1985: 15-48 (esp. 39-41).

8 Quoted in Murray Krieger, 'The Arts and the Idea of Progress,' in G.A. Almond, M. Chodorow, and R.H. Pearce, *Progress and its Discontents*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1982: 449-69 (457).

9 See M.H. Abrams, 1971a: 306; cf. René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism*, vol. 3: *The Age of Transition*, 1966: 126-27.

10 For a discussion of the aforementioned, see Munro, n.d.: 55ff.

11 Herbert Spencer, *First Principles: A System of Synthetic Philosophy*, London 1893 (1862): 350-54 (para. 124), 324-26 (para. 114).

12 E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol. 1: 32, London 1871.

13 John Addington Symonds, *Shakespeare's Predecessors in the English Drama*, London 1884; idem, *Essays Speculative and Suggestive*, London 1890; Richard Green Moulton, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, Oxford 1885; Moulton, *The Modern Study of Literature*, Cambridge 1915; H.M. Posnett, *Comparative Literature*, London 1886. For the remainder of this paragraph, see René Wellek 1973: 171ff., and idem, *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, vol. 4: *The Late Nineteenth Century*, New Haven/London 1966: 58ff, 143, 297ff, 406ff.

14 Wellek 1966: 27ff, 37-39; G. Pochat, *Geschichte der Ästhetik und Kunsttheorie. Von der Antike bis zum 19. Jahrhundert*, Cologne 1986: 562-65.

15 Pochat 1986: 535-36; M. Halbertsma, 'De geschiedenis van de kunstgeschiedenis in de Duitssprekende landen en Nederland van 1764 tot 1933,' in *Gezichtspunten. Een inlei-*

- ding in de methoden van de kunstgeschiedenis, eds. M. Halbertsma and K. Zijlmans, Nijmegen 1993: 45-102 (55ff.).
- 16 Translated from the German: '... gegen die Ausschweifungen des historischen Sinnes, gegen die übermäßige Lust am Prozesse auf Unkosten des Seins und Lebens, gegen das besinnungslose Verschieben aller Perspektiven mit dem ganzen Heerbanne satirischer Bosheiten vorzurücken.' Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (KGW), eds. G. Colli and M. Montinari, New York/Berlin 1967 ff; KGW III / I: 239-330 (319, 314-15).
- 17 See, for example, Wagar 1972: 145ff. Wellek observes a relatively sharp change at the beginning of the twentieth century with regard to the arts: 'All over the West, the anti-historical point of view in criticism reasserted itself at about the same time' (1973: 172).
- 18 Jürgen Habermas 1985: 17ff; cf. Habermas, 'Die Moderne - ein unvollendetes Projekt,' in idem, *Kleine politischen Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main 1981: 444-64 (452). For a history of the concept of 'modern,' see Malcolm Bradbury, James McFarlane, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism,' in idem, *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature 1890-1930*, London 1991: 19-55; Danto 1997: 7ff; A. Eysteinson, *The Concept of Modernism*, Ithaca/London 1990: 1-5, 144-49; Gumbrecht 1978; Hans Robert Jauss, 'Literarische Tradition und gegenwärtiges Bewusstsein der Modernität,' in Jauss 1970: 11-60; R. Piepmeier, 'Modern, die Moderne,' in J. Ritter, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 6: 54-62. A discussion of theories of modernism and modernity is excluded here. A survey and comparison of concepts of modernism in Adorno, Derrida, Barthes, et al., can be found in J. Schulte-Sasse's 'Theory of Modernism versus *Theory of the Avant-Garde*,' the foreword to Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Minneapolis 1984 (1976): xv-xxxii. Also included is a discussion of the perspective on modernism as a European literary movement originating in the interbellum, as described by D. Fokkema and E. Ibsch in *Het Modernisme in de Europese letterkunde* (Amsterdam 1984).
- 19 Cf. Gumbrecht 1972: 96.
- 20 'La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable.' Quoted in Jauss 1970: 55. See also 11ff., 54ff., and Gumbrecht 1972: 110. It is remarkable that Jauss makes no link here with the distinction he had made a few years earlier, between relative and absolute beauty, which he had appreciated in particular as an important result of the Querelle between the Ancients and the Moderns.
- 21 Cf. Pochat 1986: 558-60.
- 22 'Il faut être absolument moderne.' Quoted in A. Hauser, *Soziologie der Kunst*, Munich 1974: 719.
- 23 'Bezeichnung für den Inbegriff der jüngsten sozialen, literarischen und künstlerischen Richtungen.' Quoted in Gumbrecht 1972: 121; see also Bradbury and McFarlane 1991: 38-39.
- 24 M. Calinescu, ' "Avant-garde": some terminological considerations,' in *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 23 (1974): 67-78; F. Drijkoningen, et al., *Historische avant-garde*, Amsterdam 1986: 12-13; Gumbrecht: 122; R. Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, New York 1968: 8-12 (or *Teoria dell'arte d'avanguardia*, 1962). The concept of the 'avant-garde' is used much more broadly and vaguely in much of the literature. See, for example, J. Weightman, *The Concept of the Avant-Garde: Explorations in Modernism*, London 1973; Weightman situates the beginnings of the avant-garde in the Enlightenment and does not limit the concept to the domain of the arts. See especially 20-37.
- 25 Quoted in Drijkoningen, et al., 1986: 185. For Bürger, see 1984: 18-25.
- 26 Although Wilson's criticism of 'modernist literature' was not typical of the avant-garde perspective, the essays in *Axel's Castle* (1931) articulated at length the avant-garde's

most important objection to the artistic tradition of the nineteenth century. Wilson protested against the fact that artists retreat into hermetic symbolism or – metaphorically speaking – into a castle where everything is available except the world and real life, like Axel, in the play of the same name by Villiers de l'Isle-Adam (1890), or, one might add, into one's own house, like the eccentric Count of Esseintes in J.K. Huysmans *A rebours* (1884). Seen in that light, Wilson's critique of Dada is surprising; the very fact that he interpreted Dadaism in line with Symbolism illustrates the conflicting interpretations to which the theoretical avant-garde lent itself. See E. Wilson, *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930*, New York/London 1931; for a critique of Dadaism, see especially 189-90.

27 Bürger 1984: 47-53.

28 Quoted in Drijkoningen, et al., 1986: 178 and 174, respectively. Cf. 163.

29 Octavio Paz, *Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde*, trans. Rachel Phillips, Cambridge, Mass. 1974: 3 (or *Los hijos del limo*, 1974).

30 Bürger 1984: 63.

31 Bürger 1984: 63 (emphasis in original).

4 On Making Revolution

1 Quoted in M. Monnikendam, *Igor Stravinsky*, Haarlem 1958: 22. Cf. Eric Walter-White, *Stravinsky: A Critical Survey*, London 1947: 42-45. For the historical background and symbolic significance of this infamous evening, see Modris Ekstein's *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*, Boston 1989: 21-70.

2 Willem Pijper, 'Van Debussy tot heden' (494-98), in A. Smijers (ed.), *Algemene muziekgeschiedenis. Geïllustreerd overzicht der Europeesche muziek van de oudheid tot heden*, Utrecht 1957: 460-507. Cf. Pijper's essay on Stravinsky in *De Quintencirkel*, Amsterdam 1948: 112ff., in which he writes: 'I don't [...] believe in the counterpoint of 1750 or in the harmony of my forebears. And least of all when the master said to propagate this himself in his own day sought a more noble, because freer, music.' See for a more recent opinion on Stravinsky's oeuvre, Mikhail Druskin, *Igor Stravinsky: His Life, Works and Views*, Cambridge 1983 (trans. Martin Cooper).

3 'Ja, wer trommelt denn da? / Das ist ja der kleine Modernsky! / Hat sich ein Bubizopf schneiden lassen; / sieht ganz gut aus! / Wie echt falsches Haar! / Wie eine Perücke! / Ganz (wie sich ihn der kleine Modernsky vorstellt), / ganz der Papa Bach!' Quoted in Druskin 1983: 139-40; L. Stein, 'Schönberg and "Kleine Modernsky"', in J. Pasler (ed.), *Confronting Stravinsky: Man, Musician, and Modernist*, Berkeley 1986: 310-24.

4 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, Frankfurt am Main 1958: 127. For Adorno on the concept of progress, see Adorno 1977.

5 M. van Rossem, 'Clement Greenberg en de strijd voor de cultuur,' in *Kunstschrift* 36 (1992) 4 (July/August): 15-22 (22); Adorno 1948: 140-41, 152; Danto 1997: 72-73.

6 René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*, New York 1956: 252-69 (265).

7 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago 1970; Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change*, Chicago 1977.

8 Kuhn relativizes his skepticism toward scientific progress in 'Postscript - 1969'; see Kuhn 1970: 205-06.

9 R. Clignet, *The Structure of Artistic Revolutions*, Philadelphia 1985: 72. Clignet identifies so many differences between the arts and the sciences, and remains so non-committal that the explanatory and descriptive value of his book is limited. Another approach inspired partially on Kuhn is found in Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1982 (see especially 296-97, 301, 303-06, 326). A similar but unspecified suggestion is found in Diana Crane, *The Transformation of the Avant-Garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985*, Chicago/London 1987: 44.

- 10 Kuhn 1977: 340-51. I will return to this later in the chapter.
- 11 Kuhn 1970: 57ff., 62-64, 82-83.
- 12 Kuhn 1970: 66ff.
- 13 Nikolaus Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*, Harmondsworth 1977: 146. For the role of the invention of new techniques and theories in the arts in the development of new paradigms, cf. Becker 1982: 311ff.; Clignet 1985: 59-61. In line with new techniques and procedures is the development of new sub-specialties and art genres (photography, with its various sub-categories, video art, computer music, etc.); cf. the last chapter of this book.
- 14 Kuhn 1970: 90, 114.
- 15 Kuhn 1970: 111-15, 150. When I speak of a paradigm in the arts, I am adopting a pragmatic approach: a paradigm is thus the totality of norms and starting points that characterize and link a trend, movement, or generation in one or more of the arts, and as such, is viewed from an external perspective; it is not a consistent system of statements and rules. Although my use of the concept has been inspired partly on Wellek's approach, I abandon (post-)structuralist and semiotic implications. Such interpretations generally pay little attention to the importance of historical categories in the practice of the arts, as is seen in Rosalind E. Krauss's influential study on the avant-garde, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Chicago 1994.
- 16 Quoted in Paul Rodenko, *Tussen de regels. Wandelen en spoorzoeken in de moderne poëzie*, The Hague 1956: 68, n. 1.
- 17 Rodenko 1956: 66.
- 18 Kuhn 1970: 152-58.
- 19 E.H. Gombrich, *Kunst und Forschrift. Wirkung und Wandlung einer Idee*, Cologne 1978: 116.
- 20 Kuhn 1977: 350.
- 21 E.M. Mulder, 'Perspectief en de dimensies der verbeelding,' in *Muziek in spiegelbeeld. Essays over muziekfilosofie en dieptepsychologie*, Baarn 1985: 106-07; cf. 105.
- 22 H. Andriessen, *Over muziek*, Utrecht/Antwerp, n.d. (ca. 1950): 218-19; cf. 92.
- 23 Quoted in Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, London 1992: 187.
- 24 Susan Sontag, 'Traditions of the New, or: Do We Have to Be Modern?' 18th Huizinga Lecture, Leiden, 8 December 1989. (Text only published in Dutch translation: 'Tradities van het nieuwe of: moeten wij modern zijn?' Amsterdam 1990.)
- 25 This is quite different in the sciences. As Kuhn rightfully observes, apart from historians, few scientists are found in science museums. 'Unlike art, science destroys its past,' he writes; Kuhn 1977: 345-47. Cf. Clignet 1985: 46.
- 26 J. Chailley, *40,000 jaar muziek*, Utrecht/Antwerp 1967 (1961): 144-45.
- 27 E.H. Gombrich, 'Stijl in kunst en stijl van leven,' in *Kunst & Museumjournaal* 3 (1991) 1: 9-22 (20).
- 28 In contrast to what is often asserted, Mechel's ordering differed considerably from the evolutionary ordering of painting that the nineteenth-century museum introduced, as Debora Meijers shows in her *Klasseren als principe*, Amsterdam 1990. Nonetheless, Mechel's initiative in periodization remains important.
- 29 Hauser 1974: 80. Cf. Suresh Raval, *Grounds of Literary Criticism*, Urbana/Chicago 1998: 165-66.
- 30 Hauser, 83. For a survey of numerous (mainly older, not-reducible-to-ideas-of-progress) forms of periodization, see J.H.J. van der Pot, *De periodisering der geschiedenis. Een overzicht der theorieën*, The Hague 1951.
- 31 Quoted in Gombrich 1978: 76-78 (78).

- 32 Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word*, New York 1987 (1975): 49; Hans Belting, *Das ende der Kunstgeschichte*, Munich 1984: 11.
- 33 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. Richard Nice. Cambridge, Mass. 1984 (or. *La distinction. Critique social du jugement*, Paris 1979).
- 34 Karl Mannheim, 'Die Bedeutung der Konkurrenz im Gebiete des Geistigen,' in *Der Streit um die Wissenssoziologie*, V. Meja and N. Stehr (eds.), Frankfurt am Main 1982, vol. 1: 325-70 (330). For a combination of these three approaches in relation to the avant-garde in the visual arts, see Crane 1987. Cf. Hans Abbing, *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts*, Amsterdam 2002.

5 Innovation in Painting and Architecture: De Stijl

- 1 The translations of all the Mondrian texts cited here that originally appeared in De Stijl are taken from *The New Art – The New Life: The Collected Writings of Piet Mondrian*, ed. and trans. Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James (London 1987).
- 2 Mildred Friedman, 'Foreword,' in *De Stijl: 1917-1931. Visions of Utopia*, Minneapolis 1982: 7-9 (7). For the most important literature survey, see, in addition to Friedman, Joost Baljeu, *Theo van Doesburg*, London 1974; Carel Blotkamp, *De Stijl: The Formative Years 1917-1922*, Cambridge, Mass., 1986; idem, *De vervoljaren van De Stijl: 1922-1932*, Amsterdam 1996; idem, *Destruction as Art*, London 1994; Yves-Alain Bois, et al., *Piet Mondriaan*, The Hague/Washington/New York 1994; Rosario Charo Crego Castaño, *El Espejo del Orden. El Arte y la Estética del Grupo Holandés 'De Stijl'*, Madrid 1997; D. Langmead, *The Artists of De Stijl: A Guide to the Literature*. Westport 2000; Nancy Troy, *The De Stijl Environment*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983; C.-P. Warncke, *The Ideal as Art: De Stijl, 1917-1931*, Cologne 1998; Rosario Crego Castaño, *El Neoplasticismo y la relación elemental. Arte y estética del grupo holandés De Stijl, 1917-1931* (Ph.D. thesis), Madrid 1990, 2 vols.; Allan Doig, *Theo van Doesburg: Painting into Architecture, Theory into Practice*, Cambridge 1986; H.L.C. Jaffé, *De Stijl 1917-1931: The Dutch Contribution to Modern Art*, Cambridge, Mass./London/ Amsterdam 1986; H.L.C. Jaffé, *Theo van Doesburg*, Amsterdam 1983; Serge Lemoine (ed.), *Theo van Doesburg*, Paris 1990; P. Overy, *De Stijl*, London 1991; Evert van Straaten, *Theo van Doesburg. Schilder en architect*, The Hague 1988; Clara Weyergraf, *Piet Mondriaan und Theo van Doesburg. Deutung von Werk und Theorie*, Munich 1979; Beat Wismer, *Mondrians ästhetische Utopie*, Baden 1985.
- 3 Jaffé 1986: 204-08.
- 4 *De Stijl* I, 1 (1917): 1. Subsequent quotations are taken from the facsimile edition *De Stijl: Complete Reprint*, Amsterdam/The Hague 1968 (2 vols.; the intended third volume with commentary and translations was never published).
- 5 See, for the rest of this paragraph, Carel Blotkamp 1986; Alan Doig 1986: 1-24, 29ff.; Robert P. Welsh, 'Theo van Doesburg and Geometric Abstraction,' in Francis Bulhof (ed.), *Nijhoff, Van Ostaijen, 'De Stijl.' Modernism in the Netherlands and Belgium in the First Quarter of the 20th Century*, The Hague 1976: 76-94.
- 6 Jaffé 1986: 48-49; cf. Overy 1991: 55-66.
- 7 Cf. Robert P. Welsh, 'De Stijl: A Reintroduction,' in Friedman (ed.) 1982: 17-43 (25). Van Doesburg had earlier considered calling the journal 'The Straight Line.'
- 8 Crego Castaño 1990. Cf. Blotkamp 1987: 20ff., 136ff.; Wismer 1985: 43-52. For Schoenmaekers's thought, see Henk de Jager, et al., *Het beeldende denken. Leven en werk van Mathieu Schoenmaekers*, Baarn 1992.
- 9 As far as I know, little attention has been paid to Wölfflin's enormous influence on van Doesburg during the early years of De Stijl. For the 'breeding ground' of van Doesburg's art history, see especially A. Doig 1986: 6-23. G.J.P.J. Bolland's influence is often discernible at the levels of both content and linguistic usage in De Stijl. For Bol-

- land's relevant opinions on art, see, for example, 'Aesthetische geestelijkheid,' in Bolland, *Zuivere rede en hare werkelijkheid. Een boek voor vrienden der wijsheid*, Leiden 1912: 541-610. In some areas, Bolland's thought shows similarities to theosophical thought, which he often discusses with critical interest. For a description of Bolland's influence on De Stijl, see Crego Castaño 1990: 216-20.
- 10 See *De Stijl* I, 6 (1918): 68; II, 2 (1918): 1.
- 11 *De Stijl* II, 4 (1919): 44ff; IV, 1 (1921): 12, 13.
- 12 Jaffé (1986: 74-77) explains the Utopian attitude of De Stijl during the First World War as a reaction to the uncertainty that arose as a result of the war: 'Starting from the very fact that a realization of all the glorious hopes had proved impossible in an immediate future or at least within a measurable space and time, people tended to project their hopes into the indefinite future' (76).
- 13 *De Stijl* I, 1 (1917): 1; see also, for example, Delacroix's motto, used by Huszár in a discussion of a painting by Mondrian: 'Most writings on art are made by people who are not artists, hence all those false concepts and judgements' (*De Stijl* I, 3, 1918, 33). Mondrian made a similar observation in *De Stijl* I, 5 (1919): 49.
- 14 See, also, Blotkamp 1986: 10-11. The numbering of De Stijl changed with this volume; it no longer numbered issues from one to twelve in a given year, but adopted continuous numbering from one year to the next. After Volume VI, 12, for example, came Volume VII, 73/74 (a double issue, as would occur increasingly frequently owing to the irregularity of publication. The last number in this volume, the jubilee edition celebrating the tenth anniversary, was even called Volume VII, 79/84).
- 15 *De Stijl* VII, 79/84, 1927 (10 *Jaren Stijl 1917-1927*); cf. Overy 1991: 43-45.
- 16 *De Stijl* I, 4 (1918): 2; I, 5 (1918): 52. For a clear and concise overview of Mondrian's philosophical and ideological views, see Jaffé 1986: 54-62, and Els Hoek, 'Piet Mondrian,' in Blotkamp, et al., 1986: 39-75 (55ff.). For more extensive relevant studies on Mondrian, see Blotkamp 1987 and Wismer 1985.
- 17 *De Stijl* I, 5 (1918): 58. Mondrian owed this nickname to 'his spiritualized upward gaze and stylized steps' in the dance hall at Laren, which he often frequented during the war dressed in a formal black suit (Welsh 1982: 33).
- 18 Cees Hilhorst, 'Bart van der Leck,' in Blotkamp, et al., 1986: 154-85 (165), esp. 173; *De Stijl* I, 1 (1917): 6-7, cf. also van der Leck's 'On Painting and Architecture,' *De Stijl* I, 1 (1918): 37-38.
- 19 *De Stijl* I, 3 (1918): 25; this third issue was erroneously designated number 4.
- 20 *De Stijl* I: 5 (1918): 58. In the next volume, van 't Hoff devotes an essay to Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Church (1909), because, he writes in his conclusion, 'this architecture is the precursor of the neo-plasticism in architecture that is currently developing' (II, 4, 1918, 42).
- 21 See also Hans Esser, 'J.J.P. Oud,' in Blotkamp, et al., 1986: 123-51 (147ff.).
- 22 *De Stijl* VI, 10/11 (1925): 157-58, cf. also VI, 8 (1924): 109-10. *Wendingen* was the name of a magazine. The word 'wending' means 'turn' or 'change.' In this context, the plural 'wendingen' has an opportunistic, and therefore ironic, connotation.
- 23 See Overy 1991: 175. Van Doesburg later realized architectonic designs: the interior of the (restaurant/nightclub) Café Aubette in Strasbourg (1926-1928), with Hans Arp and Sophie Tauber Arp, although this was perhaps more painting and design than architecture, and his own house-cum-studio at Meudon (1929-1930). By this time, De Stijl had virtually ceased to exist as a movement.
- 24 For a dispute on this issue between van Doesburg and van 't Hoff, see Eveline Vermeulen, 'Robert van 't Hoff,' in Blotkamp, et al., 1986: 207-32 (228-30); cf. also Ger Harmsen, 'De Stijl en de Russische revolutie,' in Friedman (ed.) 1982: 45-49.

- 25 *De Stijl* I, 5 (1918): 50-51. The text of the footnote, to which the asterisk refers, reads as follows: 'Then what today we call *art* vanishes too – precisely because subjectivization ceases. Then, a new sphere comes into being – a *new life* arises' (emphasis in original).
- 26 For an incisive survey of Mondrian's idea of Utopian development, see Wismer 1985: 59-87.
- 27 *De Stijl* II, 2 (1918): 1-2 (emphasis in original). The manifesto was signed by Theo van Doesburg, Robert van 't Hoff, Vilmos Huszár, Antony Kok, Piet Mondrian, G. Vantongerloo, and Jan Wils.
- 28 *De Stijl* IV, 10 (1921): 145-51; IV, 12 (1921): 173-76. The articles concerned are: Daniel Henry (= Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler), *Der Weg zum Kubismus*, Munich 1920 (an extended version of an article from 1916) and M. Raynal, *Picasso*, Munich 1921 (or. Paris, ca. 1920). A year and a half earlier, van Doesburg had already called Cubism (and Futurism and Expressionism) the 'pre-birth of an entirely new and universal conception of art' (*De Stijl* III, 1, 1919, 2).
- 29 'Der Wille zum Stil (Neugestaltung von Leben, Kunst und Technik),' *De Stijl* V, 2 (1922): 23-32; V, 3 (1922): 33-41. In these essays, van Doesburg reverts to thoughts on development that he had voiced elsewhere in previous years, especially in 'The New Image in Painting' (Delft 1917) and *Klassiek, barok, modern* (Antwerp 1920; published simultaneously in a French edition in Paris). Both pieces have been reprinted in *De nieuwe beweging in de schilderkunst*, Amsterdam 1983: 31-66 and 111-26, respectively.
- 30 *De Stijl* V, 2 (1922): 28. In van Doesburg's use of the concept 'will,' one presumably also sees the influence of the notion 'Kunstwollen' ('will to art,' literally 'spirit to art'), formulated by Austrian art historian Alois Riegl, the idea of a kind of collective driving force inherent in every style period.
- 31 See the ends of chapters 3 and 6 of this book.
- 32 *De Stijl* VI, 9 (1925): 135-36. The piece was anonymous, but an English version appeared in the next volume (VII, 73/74, 1926, 29-30) under the name of Theo van Doesburg.
- 33 Quoted in Hoek 1986: 82, cf. 80. For similar remarks, see also Welsh 1982: 39-40; Welsh 1976: 90ff; Overy 1991: 42-43. For more on Mondrian's finalism, see also Wismer 1985: 59ff., 72ff.
- 34 *De Stijl* III, 4 (1920): 28. The book under discussion is I. Goll, *Die drei Guten Geister Frankreichs*, Berlin 1919.
- 35 See, for example, van Doesburg's irate reaction when Holland did not invite *De Stijl* to send a representative to the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs in Paris in 1925; 'Holland's Fiasco at the 1925 Paris Exhibition,' *De Stijl* VI, 10/11 (1925): 156-59.
- 36 *De Stijl* V, 7 (1922): 106. Van Doesburg also attacked *Valori Plastici* (an until-then somewhat related journal that had placed many advertisements in *De Stijl* and that van Doesburg had helped distribute) as one of the 'so-called "modern art" periodicals.'
- 37 See Blotkamp 1986; see Sjarel Ex/Els Hoek, 'Jan Wils,' in Blotkamp, et al., 1986: 187-203 (200); Sjarel Ex, 'Vilmos Huszár,' in Blotkamp, et al., 1986: 77-121 (112); Nancy Troy, 'The Abstract Environment of *De Stijl*,' in Friedman (ed.) 1982: 165-89 (185).
- 38 *De Stijl* I, 11 (1918): 136; Hoste's 'The Mission of Modern Architecture' appears in number 8 of the first volume (85-87) of *De Stijl*; see also *De Stijl* I, 9 (1918): 111-12, and I, 11 (1918): 135-36.
- 39 Letter from van Doesburg, 21 January 1928; taken from Welsh 1982: 40.
- 40 Quoted in Esser 1986: 136 (letter from van Doesburg to Oud, 13 March 1919).
- 41 Blotkamp 1986: 42-44.
- 42 N. Pevsner, *Pioneers of Modern Design: From William Morris to Walter Gropius*, Harmondsworth 1977; idem, *An Outline of European Architecture*, Harmondsworth 1985

- (or. London 1942); idem, *A History of Building Types*, London 1976; L. Benevolo, *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (2 vols.), Bari 1964. Cf. Crego Castaño 1990: 107-08.
- 43 Crego Castaño 1990: 112ff, 510-11; Frampton 1982: 107-09, 113-14, 120-22; Jaffé 1986: 177-79, 190ff.; Overy 1991: 156ff., 163ff., 178, 198-200.
- 44 Overy 1991: 147. He relies here on Bruno Zevi and Reyner Banham. For Frampton, see *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, London 1992. Cf. also H.H. Arnason, *A History of Modern Art*, London 1988: 216, and Crego Castaño 1990: 343-69, which includes a survey of De Stijl aesthetic innovations in architecture.
- 45 Werner Haftmann, *Schilderkunst in de twintigste eeuw*, Rotterdam 1965 (or. *Malerei im 20. Jahrhundert*, Munich 1954): 147-57; Norbert Lynton, *De moderne wereld. Schilderkunst, plastiek, vormgeving en architectuur der 19e en 20e eeuw*, n.d., n.p. (or. *The Modern World*, London 1966); Lynton, *The Story of Modern Art*, Oxford 1980; Arnason 1988: 201ff.
- 46 Jaffé 1956: 202-08. For a critique of Jaffé, see Weyergraf 1979: 64ff.
- 47 Janson 1977: 677, 680; E. Lucie-Smith, *Movements in Art Since 1945* (new revised edition), New York 1984: 109, 174, 224.
- 48 Martin Friedman, 'Echoes of De Stijl,' in Friedman (ed.) 1982: 207-27.
- 49 Quoted in P. Hoenderdos, *NRC Handelsblad*, 24 April 1981; Janson 1977: 675.
- 50 See, for example, Gombrich's illuminating *In Search of Cultural History*, The Philip Maurice Deneke Lecture 1967, Oxford 1969.
- 51 Translated from the German: 'Es ist nicht alles zu allen Zeiten möglich, und gewisse Gedanken können erst auf gewissen Stufen der Entwicklung gedacht werden.' H. Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst*, Basel/Stuttgart, 1963: 7.

6 The End of Art

- 1 Crane 1987: 142.
- 2 Kirk Varnedoe, *A Fine Disregard: What Makes Modern Art Modern*, New York 1990: 11.
- 3 Robert Hughes, 'The Future that Was,' in *The Shock of the New: Art and the Century of Change*, London 1981, ch. 8, 365-409 (375). For a more recent analysis of the end of the avant-garde, see D. Kuspit, *The Cult of the Avant-Garde Artist*, Cambridge 1993.
- 4 Sontag 1990: 8-10, 18ff., 35ff., 41-49.
- 5 Octavio Paz 1974: 6.
- 6 Belting 1984: 11.
- 7 See the end of chapter three. Cf. Hughes 1981: 385; R.F. Atkinson, *Knowledge and Explanation in History*, London 1978: 215-16.
- 8 Harold Rosenberg, *The Tradition of the New*, New York 1982: 24.
- 9 Quoted in R. Clignet 1985: 17.
- 10 Cf. Crane 1987: 1, 11, 138, 142. In many (particularly institutional) senses, Pop Art in the visual arts was still part of the avant-garde, as Crane's book reveals. It thus falls under the third factor I mentioned, of 'reflection.' A standard work on pop music is Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century*, London 1989, which, incidentally, tries precisely to establish all kinds of links between the 'high art' of the avant-garde (especially Dada and Surrealism) and pop music. Cf. also Dan Graham (ed. Brian Wallis), *Rock My Religion: Writings and Art Projects 1965-1990*, Cambridge, Mass. 1993.
- 11 Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in Benjamin, *Illuminations* (ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn), New York 1968. For a recovery of the 'auratic' through film, see Daniel Herwitz, *Making Theory/Constructing Art: On the Authority of the Avant-Garde*, Chicago/London 1993a: 239ff.
- 12 For this and the following, see Danto 1986: 81-115, 187-210; Danto 1992: 3-12, 217-31.

- 13 Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, 'Vorbemerkung über die Pragmatik der Werke (insbesondere zu den Werken von Daniel Buren),' in Lyotard, *Philosophie und Malerei im Zeitalter ihres Experimentierens*, Berlin 1986: 79-95, and Lyotard, 'Regeln und Paradoxa,' in Lyotard 1986: 97-107 (106-07).
- 14 Danto 1986: 111.
- 15 Danto 1986: 115. For the 'death of history' in literature, see Niall Lucy, *Postmodern Literary Theory*, Oxford 1998 (or. 1997), ch. 3: 'The texts of Baudrillard, Acker and Lyotard all seem to require that "history" is no longer able to function as the legitimating background to understandings of the sign, the literary text and knowledge' (61).
- 16 Although in his analysis Danto may limit himself to the visual arts, he does not fail to point out at the beginning of his argumentation that the boundaries between visual art and poetry, performance, music, and dance are becoming increasingly vague, thus widening the scope of his argument without, here or elsewhere, offering examples or arguments that might confirm this implicit claim (Danto 1986: 85). Cf. For the importance of Danto's role in this discussion, cf. Herwitz's remarks 1993a: 10ff., 25, and 312 (note 14).
- 17 Danto 1986: 89, 90, 198-99; Danto 1992: 20, 26. For Gombrich, see *Art and Illusion*, New York 1960: 28-30, 89-90. Sometime Gombrich is rather vague about the mimetic pretensions of art, especially where he views art as the solution to self-imposed problems. See Gombrich 1978: 89, 114, 116. For another slightly different view of Gombrich on representation, see the first two essays in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, London 1963: 1-29, and 'The Vogue of Abstract Art,' in Gombrich 1963: 143-50. Cf. F.R. Ankersmit, 'Historical Representation,' *History and Theory* 27 (1988): 205-29 (165-67). For a critique of Gombrich's view of (the universal validity of) perspective, see Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*, London 1969: 10ff.; Suzi Gablik, *Progress in Art*, London 1976: 66ff., 154ff.
- 18 'Art, Evolution, and the Consciousness of History,' in Danto 1986: 187-210 (200-03). For a link between expression and representation, see Goodman 1969: esp. 245ff. For a more nuanced approach, Danto 1997: 62-66.
- 19 *De Stijl* V, 3 (1922): 41; Theo van Doesburg, 'The End of Art,' in *De Stijl* VI, 9 (1925): 135-36, VII, 73/74 (1926): 29-30 (see chapter five). A similar argument is found in Daniel Herwitz, 'The Beginning of the End: Danto on Postmodernism,' in Mark Rollins (ed.), *Danto and his Critics*, Cambridge, Mass. 1993b: 142-58 (154, 156). For further reading on this subject, see Belting 1984, and Carel Blotkamp, 'Lof der schilderkunst (Crisis? What Crisis?),' in Huttenlocher, Lasker, and Van Merendonk, Rotterdam 1993: 71-76. Danto makes a similar remark in Danto 1995: 322-24.
- 20 Cf. Danto 1995: 385. What the artist means with an art work is, in the end, irrelevant, although intentions can sometimes help in the interpretation of a work. But searching for meaning is an 'intentional fallacy'; see Monroe C. Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism*, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1988 (1981/1958): 17-29. Varnedoe recognizes the expressive and representative elements in similar work by Warhol; see Varnedoe 1990: 173. For a critique of Danto's interpretation of Warhol, see especially Herwitz 1993a, ch. 8. Herwitz, too, identifies several kinds of simplification in Danto; see chs. 6 and 7. See also George Dickie, *Introduction to Aesthetics: An Analytic Approach*, Oxford/New York 1997: 51.
- 21 Jean-Christophe Ammann, 'Jeff Koons: Triumph out of Failure,' in A. Muthesius (ed.), *Jeff Koons*, Cologne 1992: 6-11 (7).
- 22 Herwitz 1993a: 13.
- 23 O. Mandelstam, 'On the Nature of the Word,' in Mandelstam, *The Complete Critical Prose and Letters*, ed. J.G. Harris, trans. J.G. Harris and C. Link, Ann Arbor, Michigan 1979: 117-32 (119).

- 24 Karel van het Reve, 'Is er vooruitgang in de kunst,' in idem, *De ondergang van het morgenland*, Amsterdam 1990: 36-45.
- 25 Wyndham Lewis, *The Demon of Progress in the Arts*, London 1954. For an excellent example of similar criticism in an art work (an installation by Hervé Fischer from 1979), see Belting 1984: 11-12.
- 26 Lyotard attempts to obviate this often-voiced objection by characterizing postmodernism more as an attitude than as a movement or period. See Lyotard 1986: 97.

7 A New Approach to an Old Concept

- 1 Italo Svevo, *Confessions of Zeno*, trans. Beryl de Zoete, New York 1958: 89 (or. *La Coscienza di Zeno*, Bologna 1923).
- 2 A similar argument related to progress in science, albeit formulated with great non-committalness, is found in Ian Hacking's 'The Accumulation of Styles of Scientific Reasoning,' in *Kant oder Hegel? Über Formen der Begründung in der Philosophie*, D. Henrich, ed., Stuttgart 1983: 453-65.
- 3 Martin Seel, 'A Defense of Aesthetic Progress,' in *Praxis international*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Jan. 1987): 416-25 (21). Cf. the interaction between Minimalism and Pop Art, Varndoe 1990: 176-78.
- 4 For a comparable study of the relationship between quantitative and qualitative progress, see Paul Feyerabend, 'Fortschritt in Kunst, Philosophie und Wissenschaft,' in Feyerabend, *Wissenschaft als Kunst*, Frankfurt am Main 1984: 85-106.
- 5 Cf. Hauser 1974: 86.
- 6 Varndoe 1990: 9-23, 99. For art as a 'language game,' see, for example, Herwitz 1993a: 3.
- 7 O. Mandelstam, 'On the Nature of the Word,' in Mandelstam, *The Complete Critical Prose and Letters* ed. J.G. Harris, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1979: 88, 117-32.
- 8 Feyerabend 1987: 97-98. Cf. Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Oxford 1972, Part 2.
- 9 Gablik 1976: 8.
- 10 Gablik 1976: 40-47.
- 11 Gablik 1976: 43.
- 12 Gablik 1976: 43-44. Cf. 80ff., 122. Incidentally, the author unconsciously illustrates how difficult it is to overcome the mimesis of the second stage: she places reproductions of Malevich's *Two Squares* (1913) and a circle (*Suprematist Element*, 1913) beneath Da Vinci's war machine (a crossbow machine consisting of a treadmill, that is, a circle, and a square-shaped house with a partition), in such a way as to suggest that Malevich must have had mimetic intentions (figs. 108, 109, cf. figs. 54-58).
- 13 *De Stijl* I, 1 (1917): 2, 3.
- 14 Gablik 1976: 90, cf. 166 and 174: 'Accusations that this is an age of "cultural liquidation" because the figurative arts are in recession, the fear that art has run its course and is coming shortly to an end, have no grounds within my theory. On the contrary, I should like to dismiss out of hand the "endgame" theory of art since [...] we are just at the beginning of a new style of thinking that can generate [...] an indefinite array of logical systems.'
- 15 Cf. for this latter section, Krauss 1994: 249-51.
- 16 Goodman 1978: 3-10, 21-31. For an overview of theories concerning representation, meaning, truth, and knowledge in the different arts, see Beardsley 1988: 267-453.
- 17 Goodman 1978: 32-33. Cf. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hassocks, Sussex 1978: 137ff.
- 18 Goodman 1978: 33.

- 19 Herwitz 1993a: 234-35. The quotation continues appropriately: 'We were seeing the future and we knew it for sure. We saw people walking around it without knowing it, because they were still thinking in the past, in the references to the past.'
- 20 Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying,' in *Selected Writings*, London 1961: 1-37 (esp. 26-27).
- 21 See Lily B. Campbell, *Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes*, London 1982 (1930): 51ff., 175-207; cf. E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture*, Harmondsworth 1984 (1943): 100-01.
- 22 Goodman 1978: 52ff., 81-95.
- 23 Goodman 1978: 245-52, 262ff. Cf. Thomas Munro, 'Do the Arts Progress?' in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Dec. 1995): 175-90 (esp. 185-87). On expression, see Beardsley 1988: XL-XLIII, 325ff.
- 24 Goodman 1978: 258.
- 25 Cf. Gordon Graham, 'Learning from Art,' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 35, 1 (Jan. 1995): 26-37 (esp. 35-36).
- 26 Goodman 1978: 256-57.
- 27 Goodman 1978: 257-58
- 28 Goodman 1978: 257-8. For social codes in relation to painting, see Varnedoe 1990: 15-17, 104ff.
- 29 For film, see Benjamin 1968.
- 30 Danto 1992: 228; see also Danto 1986: 85, 111-15; Danto 1992: 226-31. Cf. Herwitz 1993a: 31-32.
- 31 Danto 1986: 114.
- 32 Wittgenstein 1953: 230; cf. Herwitz 1993b: 148.
- 33 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, London 1933: 210-11, 450ff., 546ff.
- 34 José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses*, trans. anon., New York 1932: 24 (or. *La rebelión de las masas*, Madrid 1930).

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Index of Names

- Abrams, M.H. 47, 153n
Adler, G. 52
Adorno, Theodor W. 10, 62, 70, 140, 147n,
150n, 154n-155n
Aesop 33
Alexander the Great 21, 32
Altdorfer, Albrecht 21
Ammann, Jean-Christophe 125, 161n
André, Carl 121
Andriessen, Hans 70, 156n
Antigone 132
Archipenko, Alexander 82
Arendt, Hannah 10, 160n
Aristotle 29, 31, 133, 150n
Arnason, H. 112, 160n
Arp, Hans 110, 158n
Auden, W.H. 68, 133
Augustine (Saint) 17, 148n
Augustus 32, 151n
- Bach, Carl Philipp Emanuel 116
Bach, Johann Sebastian 61-62, 72, 127, 132,
140, 151n
Bacon, Francis (1561-1626) 22, 34
Bacon, Francis (1909-1992) 119
Baer, K.E. von 50
Baker, Chet 141
Baljeu, Joost 113, 157n
Barthes, Roland 154n
Baudelaire, Charles 43, 54-55
Beethoven, Ludwig van 123, 127
Belting, Hans 78, 118, 157n, 160-162n
Benevole, Leonardo 110, 160n
Benjamin, Walter 120, 140, 160n, 163n
Bentley, R. 33
Bergson, Henri 53
Berlage, H.P. 83, 90
Blaas, P.B.M. 30, 150n
Blavatsky, Helena 95
Boccaccio, Giovanni 43
Bodin, Jean 16, 18, 22
Boileau, Nicolas 33, 36, 150n-151n
Boisrobert, F. de 31
Bolland, G.J.P.J. 84, 89, 95, 157-158n
- Bonset, I.K. (pseudonym Theo van Doesburg)
86
Boulez, Pierre 119
Bourdieu, Pierre 79, 157n
Braque, Georges 99-100, 102, 112
Brecht, Bertolt 141
Brodsky, Joseph 133
Brown, John 40
Bruner, J.S. 67
Brunetière, Ferdinand 51
Brunner, O. 21, 149n
Buñuel, Luis 140
Bunyan, John 149n
Burckhardt, Jacob 53, 128
Bürger, Peter 56, 58, 104, 118, 152n, 154-155n
Burke, Edmund 39
Bury, J.B. 16-18, 21, 29-30, 35, 39, 147-148n,
150-151n
Butterfield, H. 148n
Byron (Lord) 132
- Calderón de la Barca, Pedro 141
Camini, Aldo (pseudonym Theo van Doesburg)
87
Carlisle, Lady 26
Carracci, Ludovico 43, 132
Cervantes, Miguel de 116
Cézanne, Paul 83, 98, 102, 105-106
Chailley, J. 73, 156n
Chopin, Frédéric 127
Churchill, (Sir) Winston 137
Cicero 148n
Cimabue, Giovanni 12, 29
Clignet, Remi 66, 155-156n, 160n
Cocteau, Jean 91
Colin, Paul 91
Collingwood, R.G. 139
Coltrane, John 141
Comte, Auguste 17, 26, 30, 35, 40, 47-49, 52,
103, 151n, 153n
Condorcet, J.A.N.C., Marquis de 20, 23, 42-43,
45-47, 48, 132, 150n, 152-153n
Constable, John 138
Conze, W. 21, 149n

- Copernicus, Nicolaus 133
 Corneille, Pierre 32, 49
 Coster, Dirk 86
 Croce, Benedetto 53, 122, 139

 Dante Alighieri 43, 116
 Danto, Arthur C. 12-14, 59, 78, 121-125, 129,
 133, 135-137, 144-145, 147n, 154-155n,
 160-163n
 Darwin, Charles 27, 50-52, 147-149n
 David, Jacques-Louis 68, 113, 149n
 Delacroix, Eugène 158n
 Derrida, Jacques 154n
 Descartes, René 32-33
 Desmarest de Saint-Sorlin, Jean 31, 37, 121
 Dewey, John 139
 Diaghilev, Sergeï 61
 Dibbets, Jan 113
 Dickens, Charles 15, 141
 Diderot, Denis 106
 Dilthey, Wilhelm 53
 Doesburg, Theo van 14, 82-90, 93-97, 99-100,
 102-111, 123, 141, 157-161n
 Domela, César 111
 Donne, John 149n
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor 15
 Dubos, Abbé 37
 Duchamp, Marcel 59, 63, 112, 119, 121, 135
 Duiker, Johannes 94, 111
 Dyck, Anthony van 124

 Eesteren, Cornelis van 94
 Eliot, T.S. 67-68
 Engels, Friedrich 26
 Eyck, H. van 76
 Eyck, J. van 76

 Fain, Huskell 20
 Fellini, Federico 119
 Feyeraabend, Paul 135, 138, 162n
 Fischer, Hervé 162n
 Flaubert, Gustave 127, 135
 Fokkema, Douwe 154n
 Fontenelle, B. de 22, 32-35, 38, 150-152n
 Foucault, Michel 10, 20-21, 26, 149n
 Frampton, Kenneth 111, 156n, 160n
 Friedman, Martin 113
 Friedman, Mildred 81, 157-160n
 Fukuyama, Francis 120

 Gablik, Suzi 135-137, 161-162n
 Gadamer, Hans-Georg 41, 140, 152n
 Galen 33
 Galileo 67, 133
 García Lorca, Federico 116
 Gehlen, Arnold 10

 Giotto 138
 Glass, Philip 15, 70-72, 91, 123
 Gogh, Vincent van 98, 102
 Goll, Iwan 106, 159n
 Gombrich, E.H. 12, 69, 74, 114, 12, 135-136,
 138, 156n, 160-161n
 Góngora, Luis de 74
 Goodman, Nelson 122, 137-141, 161-163n
 Greenberg, Clement 62, 114, 119, 155n
 Gris, Juan 112
 Gropius, Walter 92, 94, 108, 110-111, 156n,
 159n
 Guys, Constantin 54

 Habermas, J. 10, 150n, 154n
 Haftmann, W. 111, 160n
 Hals, Frans 45
 Hauser, A. 76-77, 154n, 156n, 162n
 Hazard, Paul 35, 149-152n
 Hazlitt, William 68
 Hegel, G.W.F. 12-13, 18, 24, 26, 41-42, 48, 52,
 56-57, 62, 71, 75, 84, 88-89, 95-96, 100,
 103-104, 117, 121, 123-126, 132, 144, 146,
 148n, 152n, 162n
 Heidegger, Martin 10, 132
 Henry, Daniel (= Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler)
 99-100, 159n
 Hercules 9, 11, 32, 129
 Herder, J.G. 27, 41, 48
 Herwitz, Daniel 127, 160-163n
 Hobbes, Thomas 33
 Hoff, Robert van 't 83, 87, 93-94, 104, 107, 110,
 158-159n
 Hölderlin, Friedrich 132
 Homer 31, 33-34
 Hopper, Edward 113
 Horace 32
 Horkheimer, Max 10, 147n
 Hoste, Huib 108-109, 159n
 Houdar de la Motte, A. 34
 Huet, Bishop of Soissons 31
 Hughes, Robert 117, 160n
 Hugo, Victor 153n
 Huszár, Vilmos 82-83, 83, 87, 89, 91, 98, 100,
 108, 110-111, 141, 158-159n
 Huysmans, Joris Karl 155n

 Ibsch, Elrud 154n

 Jaffé, Hans 81, 83, 112, 114, 157-158n, 160n
 Janson, Horst W. 113, 160n
 Jarrell, Randall 68
 Jauss, Hans Robert 36-38, 150-152n, 154n
 Johns, Jasper 121
 Jonas, Hans 10
 Joyce, James 116, 119
 Judd, Donald 113

- Kandinsky, Wassily 82-84, 100, 110, 116
 Kant, Immanuel, 7, 23, 25, 51, 145, 149n, 162-163n
 Keats, John 45, 153n
 Knight, Wilson 68
 Kojève, A. 144
 Kokoschka, Oskar 78
 Kooning, Willem de 116
 Koons, Jeff 124-125, 161n
 Koselleck, Reinhart 21-26, 29, 36, 36, 42-43, 46, 54, 72, 76, 91, 118, 143, 149n, 151n, 153n
 Kott, Jan 68
 Khrushchev, Nikita 24
 Kugler, Franz 52, 75
 Kuhn, Thomas S. 10, 14, 65-69, 72-77-79, 117, 127, 133, 150n, 152n, 155-156n
- La Bruyère, J. de 31
 La Fontaine, J. de 31, 36
 Lamarck, J.-B. P. de 50
 Lanzmann, Claude 142
 Le Corbusier 94, 111
 Leck, Bart van der 82-83, 85, 87, 90, 98, 100, 102, 108, 111, 141, 158n
 Léger, Fernand 112
 Lenin, Vladimir Ilyich 55
 Leonardo da Vinci 136, 162n
 Lewis, Percy Wyndham 128, 162n
 LeWitt, Sol 113
 Lichtenstein, Roy 113, 121
 Ligeti, Györgi 116
 Ligt, Bart de 109
 Louis XIV 31, 39, 151-152n
 Louis XVI 92, 107
 Louis le Grand 30-32, 34
 Lovejoy, Arthur O. 18, 148n
 Lucan 33
 Lucie-Smith, Edward 113, 160n
 Lucretius 16
 Lynton, Norbert 111, 160n
 Lyotard, Jean-Francois 10, 147-148n, 161-162n
- Macaulay, Thomas Babington 50
 Magritte, René 58, 63
 Malevich, Kasimir 136, 162n
 Mallarmé, Stéphane 99, 106
 Malthus, Thomas R. 50
 Mandelstam, Osip 127, 134-135, 161-162n
 Manet, Edouard 102
 Marcuse, Herbert 10, 147n
 Marx, Karl 26, 48-49, 144, 148-149n
 Mechel, Christian von 75, 156n
 Meier, Chr. 149n
 Mendelssohn, Felix 132
 Merkelbach, B. 94, 111
 Messiaen, Olivier 127
- Meyer, Adolf 92
 Michelangelo Buonarroti 12, 30
 Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig 111
 Milhaud, Darius 122
 Mill, John Stuart 17, 48
 Mirabeau, Honoré, Comte de 16
 Molière 32, 49
 Mondrian, Piet 14, 81-91, 94-95, 97-98, 102-106, 108-113, 119, 123, 132-133, 136-137, 141, 157-159n
 Monet, Claude 124
 Montaigne, Michel de 22
 Morgan, Lewis H. 27, 48
 Morris, William 67, 74, 85, 90, 110, 147n, 156n, 159n
 Moulton, Richard Green 52, 153n
 Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus 127, 134-135
 Mulder, E.M. 70, 156n
 Müller, Adam 45-46
 Mumford, Lewis 10
- Nestroy, J.N. 9
 Newman, Barnett 113, 132
 Newton, Sir Isaac 26, 133
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 53, 57, 100, 103, 126, 154n
 Nijinsky, Vaslav 61
 Nisbet, Robert 17, 147-148n
 Noland, Kenneth 113
 Novalis 45
 Nussbaum, Martha 140
- Ortega y Gasset, José 146, 163n
 Oud, J.J.P. 14, 82-83, 86-87, 89, 91-94, 105, 107-111, 158-159n
 Overy, Paul 111, 114, 157-160n
- Panofsky, Erwin 123, 134
 Paracelsus 33
 Pascal, Blaise 152n
 Paz, Octavio 57, 118, 155n, 160n
 Peacock, Thomas Love 49
 Pericles 117
 Perrault, Charles 30-34, 36-37, 54, 150-152n
 Petrarch 31, 43, 135
 Pevsner, Nikolaus 110, 156n, 159n
 Piaget, Jean 136
 Picabia, Francis 56, 112
 Picasso, Pablo 58, 62, 67-68, 82, 98-100, 102, 106, 108, 112, 114, 117, 127, 132-133, 138, 159n
 Pijper, Willem 61, 70, 155n
 Pijpers, Edith 96
 Plato 126, 148n
 Polke, Sigmar 124
 Pollock, Jackson 136
 Popper, Karl R. 148n

- Posnett, H.M. 52, 153n
 Postman, L. 67
 Poussin, Nicolas 116
 Prez, Josquin des 116
 Ptolemy 133
 Pushkin, Alexander 132
- Quesnay, François 16
 Quevedo y Villegas, Francisco 133
- Ranke, Leopold von 45
 Raphaël 43, 49, 132
 Raynal, Maurice 99, 159n
 Reich, Steve 123
 Rembrandt van Rijn 45, 51, 67, 100, 116, 127, 133
 Reve, Gerard 9, 147n
 Reve, Karel van het 127, 162n
 Richter, H. 86
 Rickert, H. 51
 Riegl, Alois 53, 159n
 Riemann, H. 52
 Rietveld, Gerrit 14, 82, 86, 94, 108, 110, 113
 Rimbaud, Arthur 55, 68
 Ritter, J. 147-150n, 154n
 Rodenko, Paul 69-71, 156n
 Roland Holst, R.N. 98, 106
 Rorty, Richard 148n
 Rosenberg, Harold 94, 119, 160n
 Rossini, G. A. 61
 Rousseau, H.J.F. (Le Douanier) 100
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 23, 26, 40, 42
 Roy, Louis Le 16
 Rushdie, Salman 143
 Ruskin, John 67, 85, 90
- Sainte-Beuve, Charles Augustin 55
 Saint-Pierre, Ch.I.C. Abbé de 16
 Saint-Simon, C.H. Comte de 26, 48
 Sartre, Jean-Paul 142, 145
 Scherer, W. 52
 Schlegel, Friedrich 21, 23, 25, 45-46, 153n
 Schnaase, C. 52
 Schönberg, Arnold 61-63, 70, 155n
 Schoenmaekers, M.J.J. 84, 157n
 Schopenhauer, Arthur 98, 132
 Scott, Sir Walter 45
 Seel, Martin 132, 162n
 Segal, George 113
 Seurat, Georges 66, 83
 Severini, Gino 82, 99, 108
 Shakespeare, William 49, 139, 141, 154n, 163n
 Shostakovich, Dimitri 127
 Skinner, Quentin 18-19, 21, 25, 148-149n
 Smith, David 113
 Sontag, Susan 71-72, 109, 117, 143, 156n, 160n
- Soto, J.R. 113
 Spencer, Herbert 17, 27, 47-52, 59, 153n
 Spinoza 22
 Staller, Ilona 126
 Stam, Mart 111
 Stein, Gertrude 138
 Stella, Frank 113, 137
 Stendhal 55
 Stephen, Leslie 48
 Stockhausen, Karlheinz 119
 Stravinsky, Igor 61-62, 64, 70, 73, 120, 155n
 Swift, Jonathan 33, 151n
 Symonds, John Addington 52, 153n
- Taine, Hippolyte 48, 52
 Tassoni, A. 31
 Täuber Arp, Sophie 110, 159
 Tchaikovsky, P.I. 127
 Thomas, Dylan 68
 Tietze, H. 78, 117
 Timianov, J. 65
 Tirso de Molina 132
 Tolstoy, Leo 135
 Turgot, A.R.C.J. 40-41
 Tylor, Edward B. 27, 48, 51, 153n
 Tzara, Tristan 57
- Vantongerloo, G. 159n
 Varndoe, Kirk 119
 Vasari, Giorgio 137
 Velázquez, Diego 119, 132
 Vico, Giambattista. 40
 Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, J.M.M.Ph.A. 155n
 Villon, Jacques 112
 Virgil 33
 Vlugt, Lodewijk van der 94
 Voltaire 22, 39, 95, 151-152n
- Wagner, Richard 72, 132
 Walsh, W.H. 19
 Warhol, Andy 13, 121, 124, 138, 161n
 Warren, Austin 64-65, 155n
 Webern, Anton 116
 Weightman, J. 154n
 Wellek, René 29, 64-65, 150n, 152-156n
 Whistler, James 138
 White, Hayden 20
 Wilde, Oscar 138, 163n
 Willebeek Le Mair, Henriëtte 108
 Wils, Jan 82-83, 91-94, 100, 107-108, 110, 159n
 Wilson, Edmund 56, 155n
 Wilson Knight, G. 68
 Winckelmann, J.J. 40, 46, 152n
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig 9, 13, 18, 145, 147n, 163n
 Wölfflin, Heinrich 53, 84, 157n, 160n
 Woolf, Virginia 48

Worringer, W. 84

Wotton, H. 33

Wright, Frank Lloyd 70, 83, 89, 116, 158n

