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**The Rise of the Arts in Modern Society**

**by**

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Everyone knows that the decades around 1800 witnessed revolutionary changes that were to affect the world. These changes were felt all over Europe, and particularly in Germany. Societies were affected politically by liberal democratic revolution and administrative reforms, and economically by machines, the market, and the system of industrial capitalism. The feudal and pre-industrial age was coming to an end, the post-feudal, industrial one beginning. Everything was changing, including the habits of human beings, who threw off the weight of tradition and communities. They became more independent, individual and inwardly directed, more reflective and sentimental; they left behind *Gemeinschaft* and entered *Gesellschaft*. Life was interpreted by means of a language-based culture and abstract thought.

At the same time a revolution was taking place in the relationship between life and the arts, though it has not attracted so much attention. First, art became *bürgerlich*, that is, defeudalized. Secondly, life became more aesthetic; it was pervaded by art, indeed, determined by it. At first art was important as an interpretation of life, but as life is always interpreted life, it was life itself that changed. Thirdly and finally, art itself changed: it became autonomous. These three changes were interrelated. They constitute more than a sub-topic of the sociology of art – they represent a fundamental event in the history of life. By looking at *Verbürgerlichung* (defeudalization) and the autonomy of art together, I shall sidestep the popular idea of an opposition between the arts and a philistine middle class. I intend to examine the *connection* between the middle classes, the *Bürgertum*, and the arts, in particular, in nineteenth-century Germany. We non-bourgeois of today,

as well as our anti-bourgeois artists, are its heirs. This applies especially to the birth of modernism at the beginning of the twentieth century. I shall try to explain the paradox of how this esoteric art grew out of, and in, a democratized, *bürgerliche* culture.

First, what do I mean by 'defeudalization of the arts'? The ties between art and the court, the church, and the corporate world were loosened, as art was relieved of its representative, liturgical, decorative and diverting functions – we need only think of the social position of the Composer in Richard Strauss's opera, *Ariadne auf Naxos*. The arts now became the property of a more general public. They were no longer a mere diversion, ancillary to some other interest (like *Tafelmusik*, for instance), but were important in themselves. Artists were no longer tied to commissions, roles and rules. Artistic life came into being, and the wheels of the cultural industry began to turn. This period witnessed the beginning of public and commercial concerts, organized by music societies, local government, and later by agencies. Music became a profession and a new phenomenon was born – the virtuoso, who, since the days of Niccolò Paganini and Franz Liszt, was made into a universal star by the railways. Opera became a middle-class, *bürgerlich*, rather than a courtly institution; the stalls and circles triumphed over the boxes. The middle-class need for display was satisfied here. Plots were no longer exclusively about the aristocracy, and the national language was used in libretti. Opera made the headlines and 'opera' parties were formed (for example, pro and anti Wagner factions), encouraged by the federalism and polycentrism of the German world. Amateur choirs, music festivals (known in 1830 as 'musical Olympias') and

male-voice choirs were founded as a way of 'putting the life of the people in touch with the whole of higher culture'; the elementary school was a singing school. Music played by amateurs at home was another pillar of the musical community, encompassing string quartet evenings, piano reductions of symphonic and operatic scores, and the piano lessons that were part of the education of all young ladies. The piano itself became a piece of furniture. Music became part of the public discourse and a key part of middle-class life.

Similar things were happening in the other arts. The princes' galleries were opened to the public; towns established museums; academies were transformed into state-run art colleges. These colleges, as well as artists' societies and societies for the promotion of the fine arts held exhibitions and stimulated sales; public commissions were made and a private art market came into being. Amateur watercolourists took painting lessons in the days before photography. Paintings and reproductions were *de rigueur* for the living room. Sculpture also became *bürgerlich*. To this day monuments decorate or disfigure our squares and bus stops and places of natural beauty, fountains and figures fill our public parks, and war memorials are found in every village. Before the age of television, the visible symbol was something that concerned everybody. Architecture, too, acquired a civic character. The key commissions were no longer for palaces and churches, but for town halls, museums, theatres and concert halls, schools and universities, law courts and offices and stock exchanges. The historical and symbolic 'style' in which these buildings were to be executed was a matter of dispute – should the Reichstag be Gothic, like the Houses of Parliament at

Westminster, or Renaissance in style? Here we see the beginning of something like a policy for the arts, around and with the arts.

Literary production – novels, novellas, poetry – escalated. Lending libraries and the book trade expanded, and it became normal for private citizens to own books. Young girls kept a poetry album, while young men wrote poetry and acquired the classics. The theatre, and attending it, also became part of the normal everyday life of the *Bürger* – a young person's first visit to the theatre (for example, to see *Wilhelm Tell*), was a kind of initiation rite. The theatre and literature provided one of the main topics of conversation. Newspapers and journals discussed and commented on all the arts, which spawned their own extended literature – books that laid down what it was the done thing to know. The arts began to be taught, however badly, in schools. They became the concern of countless urban societies. The state and local government – this was specifically German – supported and subsidized the arts, seeing it as their duty to support culture. That is why there were so many salaried positions, similar to those of officials, for artists.

In short, the arts became an integral part of the *bürgerliche*, the middle-class way of life, something that was taken for granted, whether out of sincere interest, or out of pretentiousness and in response to the pressure to 'belong' and conform to 'society'. However, the norms that governed this relationship with the arts in theory were more important than what happened in practice, which may actually have been quite different.

This way of life, we have said, was primarily a middle-class phenomenon. Within the middle classes, the *Bürgertum*, the main role was taken by women, whose particular

realm, according to patriarchal ideology, was aesthetic and higher concerns, and by young people. And the relationship between the middle classes and art had an impact far beyond the middle classes themselves. Schools were closed when Ludwig van Beethoven died, and between twenty and thirty thousand people followed his cortège. The unveiling of monuments and jubilee celebrations (the Schiller celebrations of 1859, for example) were quite clearly popular festivals. Male-voice choirs, oil prints and lithographs were widespread among peasants and workers; choral societies were part of the Social Democratic movement and a worker's home was not complete without an oil print.

Secondly, the 'defeudalization' of art changed the role of art in life and gave it a new function. This was a revolution. Art became part of the economy of serious life, an essential dimension of life – or, at least, of an ideal life which constructed its own image of itself. Art offered an existential way of dealing with the world and life; 'defeudalization' meant also that art acquired existential significance. Life was interpreted aesthetically – the defeudalization of art was simultaneously an aestheticization of life. Art became a part of life's Sundays and holidays, a means of orientation in the world and of understanding oneself. It had something to say about the meaning – or lack of it – of a world beyond work and success, power and money, mediocrity and normality. Art provided a secondary system, an antidote to the everyday world. I shall illustrate this with examples drawn from three conceptual fields.

Art acquired a quasi religious function: terms such as 'consecration' and 'devotional', 'piety' and 'reverence' crop up; the audience was transformed into a congrega-

tion; contemplating a work of art became an act of worship. Performances of J. S. Bach's *St Matthew's Passion* or Richard Wagner's *Parsifal* on Good Friday are extreme cases of this sort of secularization. Art, it was said, is liberating; it reconciles and comforts; art is the expression of something permanent and preternatural; yes, art is – divine. Consequently, artists were regarded as saints and martyrs. Beethoven, for instance, was seen as the proclaimer of a heroic, Promethean gospel of suffering and transcendence. We call this the sacralization of art, or art as a religion. Architecturally, cultural monuments became 'aesthetic churches'. To us, this sort of pathos is strange, but the *élan* of a life in art can only be understood if it is taken seriously. In a still religious age, the existential dimension of art was grasped in sacred words.

Using more philosophical and secular terms for my second example, we could say that art is concerned with truth and the meaning of the whole. It manifests this in symbol and feeling. According to F. T. Vischer, in his time the high priest of art, the secular educated classes believed that it preserved the heritage of religion in the coming post-religious age.

Art is an essential component of what the Germans call *Bildung*, which provides my third illustration. Human beings find self-knowledge and fulfilment only by appropriating the view of the world presented by the arts. In particular, since Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schiller (however misunderstood they might have been) art has been connected with the unfolding of human freedom, which is sparked off by the play of art. Art, therefore, took over one of the functions of religion, moving up next to, or even ahead of it. And it also moved up next to, or rather,



ahead of science and scholarship, for even philosophy no longer spoke the truth of the whole. Science and scholarship had specialized into many different disciplines and could offer only fragments; in addition, they had become ever more abstract, intellectualized and incomprehensible. Ordinary working people, too, demanded this sort of art. They were looking for compensation, or transcendence, or justification, which they needed in order to maintain an inner balance, to reassure themselves about the real values in life, or what would have been the real values in a different, un-lived life. Those who earn money like to join Wotan in meditating on the curse of gold.

This function of art split up into a number of different positions which shaped the public's practical aesthetics. I can only briefly remind you of this here. Art can be regarded as a sphere of its own and as an end in itself – like music, when it is described as 'sonorous, fluid form'. Or art can be seen as embodying the whole of the world, the truth of things and life's circumstances, a piece of the meaning of life. Alternatively, it can be regarded as embodying the modern dislocation between sensitive subjectivity and the alienated objectivity of modern, prosaic society or the absence of sense. Art, unlike the world of work and material rewards, can present an ideal; it can transfigure and reconcile the real, the inner and the outer, nature and reflection. Or it can uncover a true and disconcerting reality behind all idealizations or its own apparent nullity. It provides a utopian antidote or punctures the appearances kept up by convention; art is miserable or magnificent reality, the truth not about things, but in things. Critical or suffering, art can oppose reality, or it can aim for connivance with reality. It can offer consolation and identifica-

tion, a prop in life or a renewal of life (like Wagner), or an antidote, opposition or compensation. Agnostics and Christians, optimists and pessimists, idealists and naturalists saw things differently, but however they defined the function of art, one thing was accepted by everyone who had to do with it: art was an essential part of the interpretation of life and of life itself; it no longer merely stood in the service of piety, power or entertainment. We must fully recognize this paradox: the *Verbürgerlichung* (defeudalization) of art gave it a completely new existential status. This was revolutionary.

There were several reasons for this. The human being who left tradition behind and became an inwardly directed individual entered into the public discourse about norms and meanings. The aesthetic culture was a perfect medium for this discourse, for religion was weakening and permitted the co-existence of several gods. The expansion of the realm of industry and work made the everyday world more mundane, and the demands placed on Sundays correspondingly more urgent. The relaxation of institutions and rituals and the rationalization of life set feelings free; specialization increased the need for wholeness. It was art (not philosophy and science) that now provided an answer. Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche expressed this in philosophical terms.

My third major point is that it was not only the role of art in the life of the middle classes that changed, but also art itself. Art became autonomous. It defined its own aims, made its own rules, and staked out its own claims. A work of art was an end in itself. Paradoxically, the *Verbürgerlichung* of art and the aestheticization of life were closely connected with the fact that art became autonomous.

Autonomous art is beholden neither to a patron nor to consumers of art. It defines its own nature and laws. Autonomous art is created for an unspecified, abstract audience, for humanity, for the future; it acquires a futuristic tinge. True art exists for its own sake, and is responsible only to itself. Art is an expression of the absolute, the profundity and truth of the world and the individual, and the truth of the whole. Art is more than all ordinary and everyday things. All this gives it a strong claim, one which reached a peak in the nineteenth century. This had several consequences.

One result of this new understanding was that art became esoteric. Entertainment and diversion were excluded from the concept of serious art, as we can see in the evolution of concert programmes featuring ‘serious’ music, where in the first performance of Franz Schubert’s ‘Great C major’ symphony, Gaetano Donizetti’s arias interrupted the movements. Consequently, popular and trivial art – kitsch – came into being as a separate phenomenon, encompassing drawing-room comedy, genre painting and *Goldschnittlyrik*. Feeling, no longer ritualized, was liberated and turned into a desire for sentimentality. And because the audience, which no longer consisted of hierarchies of connoisseurs, had grown democratically and become pluralistic, market forces ensured that these needs were filled.

A second consequence was that art itself became pluralistic. First, it became historic. The art of the past had an unprecedented impact and presence. The classical canon was what counted; it had to be read, seen and heard. Museums and monuments, theatre and concert programmes, bookshelves and reproductions, as well as the tours pre-

scribed in guides books all brought people into touch with the art of the past. Scholarship constantly produced new renaissances. People were surrounded by an abundance of historical art. They could be selective, but they were obliged to feel a universal reverence. A corollary of this was that the long shadow of the past fell upon contemporary art, for art-lovers as well as for artists. Coming to terms with tradition became one of the major problems in the arts. The feeling of being a late-comer, an inferior imitator, arose among artists. It seemed as if the arts were growing old, and had used up their means of expression. Anyone who carried on traditions was suspected of being trivial.

Because such strong claims were made for art, originality was increasingly in demand, but it was also more and more difficult for true art to be original. The non-individualized period style, which, in Bach's time, had carried even middling musical talents along with it, lost its drive in the nineteenth century and became conventional. Simple works suitable for the amateur to play or sing could no longer claim to be authentic. Nor could works of art be produced with such apparent ease. It was no longer possible for someone to write more than a hundred symphonies, like Haydn, or even forty-nine, like Mozart. Similarly, the foundation which mythological symbols and the laws of genre had previously provided for the arts dissolved – Venus became merely a naked maiden, majesty a man with a crown. This further increased artists' claims to be original.

These two things – historicization and the demand for originality – had the effect of pluralizing the arts: the juxtaposition of different styles and trends became a char-

acteristic feature. In 1828 the architect Heinrich Hübsch asked: what style shall we build in? Competing styles were reflected in the pluralism of popular taste. And coming to terms with tradition increased this pluralism. Art can be young, new, avant-garde, contemporary, or classical; it can develop tradition further, or hark back to it. The conductor Hans von Bülow's comment that Johannes Brahms's First Symphony was really the Tenth is typical of this. Tradition and the avant-garde are the polar extremes.

Finally, the autonomy of art changed the role of the artist. Art's old basis in craftsmanship dwindled, as did canonized rules and fixed offices and roles. Artists became 'free' and individual in their own way, choosing their profession and 'studying' it, answerable only to 'art' and their own genius. The artist became an object for reflection. Artists like Liszt and Wagner engaged in theoretical debate, wrote programmes, commentaries, and manifestos. This, too, was a force for individualization and pluralization. Artists stood in a relationship of tension with the public. They could despise the public, or they could woo it. The pathos of not being understood began to spread. Misunderstood artists, however, could feel that they were true artists.

At the same time artists suffered from the alienation between modern, complicated art and the public, and tried to create a new understanding. This explains the use of material deriving from folk music, for example, by Gustav Mahler. Norms lost their power; the pace of change, and of changes in fashion, accelerated. The arts reflected the pluralization of the modern world. On the whole, however, the new concept of art meant that the artist was placed in a position of extreme opposition to the middle classes, to

the philistines, as they have been called since the Romantic era. Artists were outsiders. They suffered in society, and represented a higher truth than it did. The more sensitive members of the middle classes, women and young people in particular, identified with misunderstood artists in order to differentiate themselves from the 'unfeeling' sections of their society.

I have pointed out that *bürgerliche Kunst* is autonomous art; autonomous art is *bürgerliche Kunst*. But – and this is my fourth main point – art became more democratic and, at the same time, more esoteric. This gave rise to the opposition between art and the middle classes. Another consequence was that art became non-bourgeois, even anti-bourgeois in nature.

Of course, there have always been philistines, but this was not a real problem. A problem arose when, in their enthusiasm for art, the middle classes trivialized it. Because art counted for something, anyone who wanted to belong to society had to value it properly. The most unmusical person had to love music. Playing music was the done thing; it was a part of being sociable, a reflection upon the prestige of the house, and made one's daughters more marriageable. That is why all well-educated young ladies played the piano – after a fashion. At concerts and operas, showing oneself and being seen was important. The fame of a virtuoso and the opinions of newspaper critics could outweigh artistic considerations. Opera also provided the opportunity to savour one's own repressed and denied grand passions. The fact that Wagner's leitmotifs could be seen as designed to jog the memory of unmusical listeners illustrates the significance of non-aesthetic criteria among the general public. In the field of

painting, curiosity about the biography and the Bohemian life styles of artists was significant; above all, however, for the non-expert, the crucial issue was no longer 'how', but 'what': 'what does it represent' was the question asked of a painting. The popularity of historical and genre painting was an additional factor: art was incorporated into everyday life. Poetry, to take another example, was trivialized. It was forged not from words, but from feelings, mediocre sentiment, images and figures of speech, pretentious banality and trivial idealism; poetry became ornamental and edifying.

Historical culture was another area of trivialization. Art became a cultural commodity. Classical culture was placed on a pedestal or put into a glass case; it lost its vitality. Classical literature, for example, was no longer read, but only quoted; it was, perhaps, enveloped in the 'slime of Alexandrian cultural barbarity' (Paul de Lagarde) or, like the significant poetry of the period, distorted by the application of worn-out traditions. Thus, the old and hallowed was given precedence over the new and spontaneous; tradition determined what was acceptable and worthy of being called art. The educated public became conservative. Finally, culture enshrined an aesthetic of vulgar idealism. Art was to uphold the unity of what was good, true and beautiful, and was thus bound to middle-class morals and taboos: it was not to offend against the ideal or the real; it was not to be ugly, or amoral; it was not to aestheticize. The trivial idealism of the *Bürger* determined what was worthy of being called art.

In short, the free and anarchic element of all art was immobilized by tradition and over-familiarity; art was drawn into collusion with the tradition of art and the ideal

world of middle-class values in order to buttress complacency. Art was trivialized by the use to which the *Bürger-tum* put it; the force of its claims was weakened. The middle-class celebration of genius which crosses all boundaries, compensating for the opportunities denied by ordinary life, was – how could it be otherwise – limited to the dead. As the number of art-lovers grew, the number of real connoisseurs declined, and the consumers' aesthetic of the trivial (which asked: what does a picture show?) came to predominate. The *Bürgertum* used art to celebrate the status quo and complacency, or they drew upon it for those borderline questions which were – just – permitted. They trivialized and deformed art, which they had given such a central place in their lives.

Independently of this acquisitiveness and trivialization which placed the 'consumers of art' into opposition with it, art possessed its own momentum which increased its antagonism with the public. Art became more complicated and esoteric; it became uncertain of itself, restless, and experimental. Originality was defined as innovation, and this became the criterion for authenticity. The middle class wanted stability, while art, according to its own laws, was unstable, even destabilizing.

When the methods and techniques of art become more complicated, it becomes élitist; it becomes art for experts. In music, increasingly complex harmonies, melodies and rhythms ruled out 'noble simplicity' and, once and for all, went far beyond the technical abilities of amateurs. In the age of photography, art turned its back on realism. Poetry became esoteric linguistic artistry. But the content of art, too, the registers of feeling and experiences of the world that it expressed, became more complex, unconventional,



marginal, subjective, anarchic and thus anti-bourgeois. In its treatment of the erotic, for example, art undermined the middle-class convention of respectability – to different degrees, of course, in the various arts, from architecture and music on the one hand, to literature and painting on the other. Nevertheless, serious art became increasingly both un-bourgeois and anti-bourgeois. More and more, artists felt themselves to be outsiders, advocates of the free and elemental, of what is stifled by society and civilization. They wanted art as a world opposed to that of the middle classes. This was the result of the history of *Verbürgerlichung*. And the trivialization of art, which secured the middle-class world against the unease created by art, points up the contrast. Incipient modernism in art was the criterion which clearly revealed the opposition between art and the middle classes. We must remember this, even while radically modifying the élitist criticism of the middle classes expressed by the aesthetes.

My fifth main point is that around 1900, in Germany as elsewhere, modern art erupted on to the scene. To a considerable extent, it established itself and found a public, not despite the middle classes, but with their aid. This needs explanation. I can remind you of just a few stages of this development here. In the visual arts, it began with the revolt of *Jugendstil* against historicism and empty imitation, surrogates and pathos, idealism and realism. Then there was modern, functional architecture, represented, for example, by the work of Peter Behrens. This sort of architecture was commissioned, by AEG and other large companies, state and city administrations, as well as by princes and individual citizens. Factories, warehouses, offices, town halls, railway stations, churches, and even

the German embassy in St Petersburg were all built in the new style, and it was used in designing workers' settlements. These were modern buildings for modern people, proud of their modernity; in contrast to the veiling and concealment of historicism, this was industrial art and industrial culture. It is typical that the majority of traditionalists as well as of the younger generation professed at least a sort of semi-modernism; in contrast to the 1920s, the revolution against Wilhelmine culture was strong enough to unite the Left and the Right, Gropius and Schultze-Naumburg. This was followed by the Deutsche Werkbund and its programme of industrial design, which permeated everyday life with aesthetic values. The Werkbund's exhibition in Cologne in the summer of 1914, that is, in the days before the motor car, attracted more than one million visitors.

In painting, too, the middle-class public accepted modern trends, which in this case, of course, were not committed to functionalism. The art of the Secession – impressionism, *Stilkunst*, symbolism – had some success against imitative idealism and photographic realism, against the prosaic world of functionalism and rationality. Critics, art dealers, patrons, collectors, buyers, readers of journals, museum founders, and in west German cities communal patrons as well, all took part in this movement. The middle classes allowed themselves to be carried along by the first wave of pre-Expressionist modernism. They supported its un-bourgeois themes and its revolutionizing of ways of seeing. In the same way, even the Expressionists found a middle-class audience. In music, we need only point to the success of Richard Strauss. The literature and theatre of the turn of the century were not, perhaps, anti-bourgeois, but

they were certainly un-bourgeois in character – for example, in their use of aestheticism and decadent themes, or their celebration of ecstasy and Eros, as in the work of Rainer Maria Rilke. The middle classes, too, saw this as a new beginning. The career of Gerhart Hauptmann, a writer of the opposition who became a grand old man of literature (*Dichterfürst*), is another example. Hauptmann's naturalism based on empathy and his neo-romantic symbolism, both totally un-bourgeois, were well suited to this representative role.

Naturally, not all tensions disappeared. The radicalism of the avant-garde, *enfants terribles* and small esoteric circles remained alien to the *Bürgertum*. Clever critics of modernity had their not-so-clever hangers-on, providing anti-bourgeois artists with a constant supply of new targets. And of course, there was the Kaiser, who professed a populist anti-modernism. But more striking was the relatively widespread acceptance of moderate modernism in all its un-bourgeois manifestations. The middle classes had left behind their sheltering traditions; they wanted to be modern; they *were* modern. A revolution in art went hand in hand with a change in middle-class consciousness. Why was this so?

We shall approach the answer from outside. Politically, German federalism had a part to play, and competition between capital cities was one factor. When Hugo von Tschudi, the director of the National Gallery in Berlin, lost his position because he incurred the Kaiser's wrath, he became director of the museum in Munich; Darmstadt and Weimar became centres of *Jugendstil* and the Secession; the Establishment itself became pluralist. The controversy about which works of art should be sent to the 1904 World

Exhibition in St Louis revealed neutrality in arts policy, even pluralism among top officials and the aristocracy. The observation that the Germans' remoteness from politics in the authoritarian state (the ideal of the unpolitical) encouraged a concentration on culture and therefore on art as a means both of coming to terms with the world and of achieving fulfilment takes us deeper into the matter. This was more than seeking refuge in *Innerlichkeit*. It provided space for change and modernity. In short, in Germany there was a reciprocal relationship between remoteness from politics and artistic intensity, between conservatism and modernity.

But the real reason for the birth of modernism out of the spirit of middle-class culture lies in the function of art in middle-class life, and in the changes it now underwent. One of the things that art had always dealt with was the 'Other', as opposed to ordinary reality; it had to do not only with what was intrinsic to humanity, but with experiences of marginality, with extreme situations and feelings, fantasies and abysses of sceptical, elegiac, or pessimistic hue. This reminded those who came into contact with art of lost opportunities in their own lives, of their own sufferings and dreams; it allowed them to enter into a more sensitive relationship with reality and relieved them of the burdens of grief and of responding to challenges in their everyday lives. This also contained the element of uneasiness which art could introduce into life. It had always represented a foreign body in bourgeois life. The situation became more critical around 1900. The middle-class need for the non-bourgeois grew; the bourgeoisie became more differentiated, crisis-ridden, and felt a greater need for compensation. The world was becoming more complex and differen-

tiated, and this process also affected subjectivity, reflection, feelings, experiences, the relations between people, and love; transitions, minglings and ambivalences gained in significance. This had consequences for attitudes to art. The differentiation of experience and aesthetic means in modern art can be clearly traced in music, from Wagner's *Tristan* to Strauss's *Elektra*, where what had been dislocated and highly concentrated encountered a growing interest in life. Modern art fulfilled the modern soul's growing need for differentiation. The astonishing phenomenon that modern literature's fascination with the morbid and the decadent was so strongly echoed by the middle classes should be mentioned here; they saw in the excesses of art and of the 'Other' a reflection of their own dislocated and nervous condition.

Thereafter, the symptoms of a crisis of modernity, and of the losses it implied, multiplied. Doubt was cast on the belief in progress founded on work and morality, science and scholarship, industry and technology. Not only the conservatives, but also the modernists themselves deplored the alienations of modernity. Uneasiness within culture became a phenomenon of the times. The world became more technical and rational, less magical, more accountable and bureaucratic. The free and unmediated diminished; secondary systems and experiences pressed forward; reflection was separated from action; logocentrism became a burden; the diversity of roles increased, as did the pressures they exerted. Wholeness and meaning became uncertain, and neither religion nor science and scholarship could provide valid answers; moral relativism spread. People's cultural confidence weakened. This was the crisis of modernity. People experienced it not because

they nostalgically harked back to tradition, but because they quite deliberately accepted the challenge of modernity on its own terms.

Criticism of modernism was the second stage; Nietzsche was its protagonist and father. This disposition, in turn, explains the resonance achieved by modern art, for it was this art – subjective-expressive, anarchic-chaotic, form-dissolving, and evocative – which attacked existing rational and bourgeois modernity and its shortcomings, or aimed radically to transform it. It could express modern crises and modern freedoms in a modern idiom because it was no longer dominated by rationality. It corresponded to the breaking out of convention in the nineteenth century, the escape from Wilhelmine culture, and expressed what the middle classes felt to be a part of their own problem.

And finally, those who felt affected by the problematic of modernity, by the dislocation between subjectivity and institutions, wanted compensations. When life could no longer offer anything of elemental force, then at least art should; when the world was desensitized and nature had dwindled, art was expected to provide a new sensuality and a new nature; a new subjectivity replaced alienation, and morbidity and suffering took over from rude health. In short, the middle-class world demanded the ‘Other’, transgressions, the alien, excesses, and the esoteric as an antidote to its own ordinary and everyday existence, which had become problematic. The middle classes were on the move and, in spite of their unshaken love of order, needed the opposing pole of disorder. That is why autonomous, modern, anti-realistic art was so attractive. Aestheticism and formalism, and protests against middle-class values fulfilled a bourgeois need for a counterweight to middle-class mediocrity. And because the middle classes, naturally, did

not participate in the radical rebellion of modernism, they could take it seriously and accept it as a compensatory sphere.

The remarkable fact that modern art saw itself as a new religion – exemplified by Franz Marc or Rainer Maria Rilke, for example – again points to the quest for meaning among middle-class contemporaries. In it, states of the soul and the need for art coincided completely.

Thomas Mann typified this situation. He made the artist/*Bürger* one of the recurring themes of his life's work, universalizing it as the theme of normality and difference, alienation and isolation, an ordered life and fertile anarchy, and the world of achievement and chaos. While artists longed for the 'pleasures of being ordinary', the *Bürger* craved the sensitivity of being different; aestheticism and the lure of the abyss posed as much of a threat to art as did normality. The same applied to the normality of the *Bürger*: the unfathomable and the alien threatened bourgeois self-confidence. Thus, life in culture co-existed with an uneasiness within culture. This explains the eruption of modernism from within middle-class culture, and shows how the trivialization of the arts and alienation from culture were overcome.

The rebels against our bourgeois grandfathers shaped modernity. They had no reason to speak of its *bürgerlich* origins. But that was a long time ago. Nowadays, we can see that justice is done. We can point to the greatness of the *Bürgertum* in the period of the birth of modernism. As a class representing a way of life, the bourgeoisie has passed away. But the subject of this lecture – a life which can partly be fulfilled through art – is something that we have accepted and generalized as a design for living. We are all heirs of the *Bürger*.

## Further Reading

For a more detailed history of the arts, aesthetic culture and its social dimensions the reader is referred to my two volumes on German history in the nineteenth century: *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866* (1983), translated into English as *Germany. From Napoleon to Bismarck*, 2 vols (1990), and *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918*, part 1 (1990). My *Wie das Bürgertum die Moderne fand* (1988) is an expanded essay on the subject of this lecture.