

Twilight of Western Art Principle

— Art at the 21st Century —

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0. Paradox of creativity.

To ask of the state of art at the next century presupposes to expect a radical change in art. We have known for some twenty years about many arguments on this topic. But, it is not easy to decide if the so-called postmodernism constitutes a really radical change in art. A change in art can be qualified to be radical, only when it concerns not the stylistic variety but the idea or philosophy of art, which manifests itself in the function or position of art in our social and intellectual life. Being not able to tell if the artistic postmodernism brings about a dimension really new, I am at least sure that our problem consists in possibility to renovate the modern philosophy of art. The cultural status the art enjoys actually is a exceptional one in the history of culture: that was realized only in the modern civilisation of Western world. And we feel now that this modern Western civilisation is losing its vital force. The crisis of art comes from this general situation.

Then, for what reason did the modern civilisation give the art this high status in culture? It was nothing but for its creativity. Western people in modern times were awakened to their own creativity. Since then, they have been struggling to conquer the nature as creature of God and to humanize it; they have thus rivaled God. A Descartes sketched in his program called "tree of philosophy" a rose-coloured future: human creativity was considered as contributing only to the well-being and happiness of humanity. In this context, creativity finds expression especially in technology and industrial productivity.

Creation in a human sense of the word consists in realizing something new. As far as it meets wants and supplies needs, creation contributes to the welfare of humanity. But we know now that the human creativity has passed certain limits and changed its nature: it aims now more to produce needs and desires than to satisfy them. We are obliged to ask ourselves whether it is desirable to have more desires only to appease with much difficulty. Even at this moment, the creativity is pursuing novelties at the cost of the clean and safe environment of our own existence. Everyone feels that the civilisation is being driven into a blind alley. I want to name this situation a paradox of creativity. I say paradox, because humanity seeks to develop their ultimate possibilities to find themselves, as a result, spoiling their own basis of existence. Indeed, creativity is the veritable ill of the modernity.

Art is a epitome of the modern civilisation. And the creativity as ideology of modernity is represented here by the avant-garde movements including that one called post-mod-

ernism. The spirit of the avant-garde consists in persuing something new at any cost. So it partakes of the mentality of consumption in the sense that they are not willing to halt nor to look back but only to go ahead. But we have impression that, having exhausted most possibilities, they have no chance left any more. So in order to imagine the artistic situation at the next century, we should, in my sense, concentrate our attention to some symptoms which do not seem to have stemmed from the modernist ideology.

1. Technical reproduction of art.

The most popular topic of our problem is probably the reproductions of art, on which a fervent discussion was made during the years 60's and 70's, at the suggestion of W. Benjamin as well as McLuhan. Being brought about by the development of technology, it is a very conspicuous phenomenon of change. I will not enter into the details of the discussion; the debate is over and the reality has been developed in favour of the reproduction to such point that no one speaks of reproduction any more concerning movie, photography, even record including compact disc and music tape, and video. Of course, we have to distinguish the case of movie and photography from that of genuine reproduction such as print of oil painting and record of live concert. But I prefer to simplify the problem. Here, only three points are to be noticed: namely the degree of fidelity, the style of reception, and the popularity.

The technic of reproduction has been improved so that poor fidelity offers no more reason to reject the reproduction of art. Especially for the reproduction of a lithography and engraving, the technic is now so perfect that it is indispensable to inscribe expressly on the surface some mark of reproduction in order to avoid scandals. And since long ago, it is very difficult to distinguish by ear a performance of record from a live one. Then we might say that a reproduction is materially different from the original, but the same as to its effect on the level of experience. However, an aesthetician like Professor T. Imamichi rejected the reproduction because of the difference of experience style a reproduction brings about. In fact, we don't listen to a record music in the same manner as in a concert hall.

The fact is undeniable. But for what reason the manner of listening to a record music can be judged inferior and improper? What guarantees, on the contrary, the authenticity of the experience style of concert hall? When the record music was in the minority and was accepted only as a sort of substitute music, this value judgement was taken for granted. But the situation was now changed so that we are forced to renounce the classical view of aesthetic experience. Adopting a relativistic point of view, we must ask of the authenticity we are used to acknowledge to the experience style peculiar to the concert hall music: Isn't it a simple historical phenomenon which was established in the 18th or 19th century in the Western world? That is the problem, and it constitutes even the most crucial point of our problem. Because, as Henri Gouhier said, it is especially the art in which existence precedes essence. We could not have a fixed standard in art.

Therefore, I think the most essential point of the technical reproduction of art is not the quality but the quantity, I mean diffusion or popularization of art. The quantitative change

brought about by the reproduction hits the heart of the modern system of art, which is based upon a differentiation of pure art from popular one. Thus we pass to our second topic.

2. Pure vs. vulgar.

The modern system of art was established upon the radical distinction of art from craft: art is noble and craft vulgar. The distinction started in the visual arts, but the case of literature and music is now more interesting. We have an old custom to distinguish pure literature and pure or classical music from popular ones. But now the border of these two spheres is becoming more and more obscure. Let me cite the Japanese vocabulary. We have a word "geijutsu" to translate "art" with; and the "artist" is translated with a word "geijutsu-ka". To these words is attached a connotation of cultural prestige and nobility. But some Japanese have used for about ten years directly the English word "art" and "artist" in place of these Japanese words, and this tendency is spreading little by little especially among the younger generations. Then, what is meant by this new manner of use of word?

I remember a slight shock that a young popular singer caused with laughter among my children by calling herself "artist". Understanding this utterance in terms of "geijutsu-ka", my children judged it as laughable pretention. But now, I am sure that was not the case. There are true professionals among popular artists, well trained and long experienced. It is especially them who adopt to call themselves "artist" to differentiate themselves from the idols without any knowledge nor skill, as well as from prestigious "geijutsu-ka".

On the other hand, there are also some avant-garde artists who call themselves "artists" avoiding the traditional title of "geijutsu-ka". In this case, the intention may be a little different; it seems to me that they want to differentiate themselves from the traditional and institutionalized artists through this manner of qualification. At the same time, they are certainly aware of the fact that they share the appellation with certain popular artists, and seem to take it for preferable. So in the art world of Japan, the English appellation "art" and "artist" has a certain value of protest: it expresses a will to annihilate the old differentiation between pure art and the popular one and to place the authentic art in their sense elsewhere than in the institutional and authorized art. It resembles somehow to the unified appellation "Ms" which is opposed to the older distinction between "Mrs" and "Miss". And in the context of Western world of music, we might think of the cases of Friedrich Gulda and Chic Correa, and in a much stronger degree Chronos Quartet.

Of course, the problem is to judge the nature and the reach of this protest. It may be possible to interpret it in terms of act of democracy extending the sphere of art to include the craft, or as a simple sign of confusion. I would like to recall the fact that the artists had and have always a striking tendency to prefer a simple appellation of professional to prestigious one the society gives them with esteem. I feel in it a sign of something like a pride of craftsman. For example, in France, the actors prefer to call themselves "comedian" to "acteur", and we have the same fact also in Japan. The now famous debate proposed by R. Barthes and M. Foucault on the "death of author" seems to me coincident with this old

manner of the writers who prefer always the simple appellation "writer" to "author". Taking this fact into consideration, we might be able to reconsider the situation as return to the natural state and dissolution of an artificial differentiation established by the modern institution of art.

3. Intellectuality of art.

What was the mark which differentiated art from craft in the modern system of art? At least one of the most important factor is the spirituality or intellectuality. Typical was the case of novelists. For a long time, novelists have been thinkers as well as creators of fiction. It was a very important condition in order to be qualified as a writer of pure literature. As representative ones, we may cite the names of Bernard Shaw, Bertholt Brecht, Albert Camus, and J.-P. Sartre, but I think the situation was alike everywhere all over the world: we are inclined to think that a novelist as such must have his own opinion on every human affair.

In my opinion, this mode of novelist-thinker has its origin in the time of the Enlightenment, and does not go back further. Before that time, Shakespeare and Racine were not like a Voltaire. We must take note of the fact that just at that time were established the modern ideas of art and literature: literature as art was born with a mark of thought.

I do not know well the current situation of literature in the world, but it seems to me that we have no more novelist-thinkers like Sartre among the younger writers. You might cite the case of Umberto Eco and his best-seller novel the *Name of Rose*. But this novel is very much different from the *Paths of Freedom*, just as his semiotics from the ontological philosophy. At least, I can tell that the situation in Japan is like that. The younger generations do not like any more to read novels in general and especially serious ones. So the younger novelists show a striking tendency for lightness, or even frivolity, to such point that we should be surprised that a young novelist pronounces his personal opinion on some social problem.

4. Alienation of the public from creator.

Now we move to another aspect of actual state of the art: namely, the dissociation between artist and appreciator. We are concerned here with a result of long process rather than a change in progress. Provoked and encouraged by the modern ideology of creativity, artists have always pursued after novelty, cultivating new styles or new systems of expression. So their productions go more and more beyond the reach of the public. The most striking is the case of such art as music that needs profound and complicated knowledges and a skill to manage them. From Rameau to Schönberg, the process of development was just like that of physics from Newton to Einstein. The formers are accessible even to the public, but the latters belong to the sanctuary of professionals. For example, the music of John Cage is quite simple as to its sound texture and composition. But because of his philosophy supporting this sound, his music is not easily accessible to the public.

According to Professor Kosaku Toguchi, eminent scholar of Western music of the Middle Ages, we have thus such an extraordinary phenomenon in the field of classical music as the unpopularity of contemporary productions contrasted with the popularity of old ones like works of J. S. Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. To the contrary, the popular music shows a sound tendency because here new pieces are always popular and we forget more and more the older ones. But here also, to some extent, we have now some classics of popular music with the revival of the Beatles and Elvis Presley.

Indeed, this phenomenon comes from the fact that the avant-garde has lost the support of the public. Probably this is also an eternal dilemma of art: artist must go further and more and more deeply, and thus risks of losing the support of the public, which is however the basis and the life itself of art. Here we have the esoteric domain of art. We may remember the episode developed by Balzac in his short novel *Unknown Master Piece*: the old master stares at something in his master piece in question, which the layman does not finally succeed in finding out. This paradoxical dimension of art is rarely discussed in the aesthetics. A rare exception must be found in the scandalous position of the romantic art in the system of Hegel's *Aesthetics*: the romantic art is the one which has lost some portion of its perfection because of the excess of intellectuality. Then, what his system suggests seems also useful for us: the death of art. In the dialectic movement of history, the hegelian Spirit has already surpassed for ever the stage of consciousness peculiar to art. But probably we should rather suppose a life cycle of art and art system in place of the dialectics. We might have exhausted all possibilities of the modern art, and the life of this system promoted by the philosophy of creativity might be expiring now. If I were right, then we need a kind of renaissance in the literal meaning of the word, that is, a renewal of the life of art.

5. Symptom of renewal (1): the ethnic and folklore.

I think we find a symptom of this renewal in the fashion of ethnic or folkloric art; I understand by "ethnic or folkloric art" all artistic forms that are not based upon the principles of Western art and have no claim of universality. Since aestheticians of eighteenth century like Dubos, Young and Herder emphasized the importance of indigenous nature as basis of artistic creation, the Western artists have been interested in the ethnic or folkloric art as treasury of material. We know that Stravinsky and Picaso borrowed vital power from the ethnic art and inject it into their art. But the actual interest in the ethnic and folkloric is of another nature. It does not matter any more to renovate the Western art but to renew the art from its fundamentals.

Music gives us a striking example, because the system of tonality and style of composition and singing, all is different in non-Western music including the Japanese. Many people have thought that the Western music based upon a solid theory is a better one or even *the* music, and that the other musics categorized as the ethnic are only peripheral ones. A Western musicologist like Zuckerkandl pronounced it. I think he is right as far as it is a matter of tone system. But music is not only matter of tone system. That is the problem

and the situation is changing little by little. Even among avant-garde composers, there appear some who abandon the tonal system which have been taken for the basis of superiority: the Western music is rendered relative from within. More important seems the growing interest in the ethnic music especially among the young.

I would like to cite once more the case of Japan. In modern Japan, especially after the end of the second world war, the art in western style and the traditional one have developed quite separately, so the appreciators also: the lovers of the one do not like the other and *vice versa*. In general, it has been the older generations who loved the traditional music. Now the interest in the traditional as well as other ethnic ones is spreading more and more among the younger people. There are even some people who seem to have lost the sense of differentiation between the Western and the ethnic music and listen to any music quite indifferently. What is important is that the Western music becomes one of the many possibilities of music for them. Thus the Western art is losing its monopolized position, and becomes relative one.

6. Symptom of renewal (2): from appreciation to creation.

The second symptom of renewal of art is the change from the art as something to appreciate to something to practise. At the eighteenth century, the history of philosophy of art switched from poetics to aesthetics, that is to say, from theory of creation to that of appreciation. And the modern ideology of art has distinguished strictly the domain of the one from the other: philosophers theorized only the appreciation and kept the creation at a respectful distance to shut it in a mysterious sanctuary. In this ideological climate, a Borodin and a "Douanier" Rousseau are exceptions and have not been considered seriously.

Someone might protest from the field of literature against this outline of the modern aesthetics. Indeed, the so-called theory of reader or reading is a recent issue, while the main trend of literary studies before was oriented toward writers. Yes, he is right. But we need to inquire into the origin of this history. If the modern literary studies concentrated on writers, it was just because the philosophy of art mystified the creation and said that we must question the author in order to reveal the secrets of a work. Then, we must also ask the real intention of the recent theories of reading. One of the main topics in this new trend, in my opinion, consists in the claim of the creativity peculiar to the act of reading. Since the time of the new criticism, the works of critics have tried to demonstrate that an interpretation of a work can be as creative as its production. We may regard this tendency as a sign of transposition of the place of creation, from writer to reader. The criticism of a Roland Barthes, for instance, doesn't it occupy the place which has been occupied by the fiction in the world of literature? From this point of view, it is possible to interpret his case as well as that of the author of the *Name of Rose*, as a participation of appreciator in the creation. It is a new form of art, which did not exist before.

In this context, I should like to refer to a traditional custom of art life in Japan: namely artistic praxis by amateurs. In the Japanese tradition, the art is rather to practise than to appreciate. So many people practised and practise even now painting, poetry, dancing,

singing, playing an instrument, reciting theater verses, etc. It is in principle the traditional art that is practised in this manner. But this custom extends for example to the oil painting, which came from the Western world. We have several big exhibitions open to the public, to which a lot of amateur painters subscribe their oil-paintings as well as traditional ones.

This practice has been taken for a para-phenomenon of art rather than authentic one. It is normal, if we adopt as standard the quality of products or performances, as it was just the standard in the modern aesthetics concentrated in appreciation. But it is this modern standard of aesthetics which has now to be revised. So we must ask ourselves if the result is all in art. In this actual trend, the old custom of art practice must be seriously reevaluated. We learn, indeed, much more through our poor practice than in appreciating great master pieces of the world.

With regard to this artistic practice of amateurs, computer seems offer many possibilities. The most interesting is the case of musical composition with computer, because the composition which needs much knowledge is not an activity accessible to laymen. The computer used as tool of composition is opening the door of this field to everybody. We know I. Xenakis, one of the outstanding composer of contemporary music, has tried for about ten years to exploit and diffuse this kind of composing machine. I don't know if he has already succeeded in his project. Anyway, his conception aims clearly at a new future.

7. Art at the 21st Century.

Thus I have mentioned some symptoms of change I have noticed in my experiences. Now I have to sketch, using my imagination, the position of art at the 21st century. As I have stressed it, it is a matter of change in the notion or philosophy of art. So, in order to imagine a future, I would like to look back once more to the outlines of modern philosophy which supported the modern art.

What is absolutely particular to this aesthetics, i.e. what we can find in no other civilisation, is the fact that being authorized and consecrated by philosophy, art was promoted to a cardinal element of culture: the modern Western philosophy found in art the agency of the harmony of human being. Then, we must ask why this agency was considered indispensable, and why the modern philosophers could entrust this very serious role to art. Here I prefer to venture to tell my opinion in few words as follows. The most basic idea of the modern Western philosophy was to set the man as "spirit" (*ingenium*) namely something that thinks and invents. Then the philosophers had to ask of the relation between this spirit and the another half of the world, which is the matter or nature. Then, the ideal was found in the harmony of spirit and matter. The prototype of this ideal is the human being itself which is constituted of mind and body. But as far as mind is power of thinking and able to control the body, this harmony can not be a simple fact, but something to reestablish. It was a particularly serious problem, because the moderns were people who suffered from the illness of the excessive self-consciousness divorced from the body. Then they turned their attention to art, because in art, the meaning, equivalent to spirit, is embodied in a matter, and

the matter must reveal the meaning, so that the harmony is a fundamental condition of being for a work of art. Thus, the ideal of human being was to be mirrored and realized in art.

We must not, however, miss what dominates really in this modern perspective of philosophy. It was not the harmony itself that dominates, but the master of creativity that was the pure spirit. The realization of harmony entrusted to art was in fact a compensation of the domination of pure spirit. So when the modern philosophy, the German idealism above all, brought forward the human ideal of harmony to be realized by art, the arrogant dominance of pure spirit had already started. The philosophers, proposing this ideal, seems to be vaguely aware that it was too late; as a matter of fact, their attitude toward art was retrospective. We find a typical case of this attitude in the history of art by Hegel, according to which the harmony is possible only in the far remote past of ancient Greek, and the modern creativity is already based upon an excessive spirituality. With regard to the harmony, the hope placed on art seems vain. The prestige given by philosophy even promoted the dominance of spirit over art. And the ideology of creativity encouraged the spirit in its pursuit of novelty. We know that the course has been accelerated enormously during these last hundred years.

We are now asked to pay the bill made by the ideology of creativity. During the last two centuries, we have exploited nature as material resources. As a result, our relationship with nature has become the most urgent and the most serious problem. We are now obliged to acknowledge the fact that the basis of our existence is common to all humanity. Willing to maintain the pursuit of our own interests, we will have to take even mortal consequences of it for ourselves: that is our actual situation. We cannot continue any creation without regard to this communal problem. Art can not be exception. The pollution of art is not a metaphor, because we are actually suffering from an inflation of art. We live in the midst of art, almost drowning in a flood of images and sounds. As a result, we have become insensible to ordinary stimuli, and thus lost much of aesthetic capacity, because a good work of art does not necessarily radiate strong stimuli. We know now that richness in quantity does not always make us happy.

I described this actual situation of art in terms of the last phase of a life cycle. In order to have a prospect of next life of art, we ought to learn from the history of modern ideology of art. Then, we recognize the decisive part played by philosophy. Philosophy was far from empty doctrine in library. It was indeed the philosophy stressing creativity that has oriented the modern civilisation till now. It must be also another philosophy that will open a new life of civilization. But we do not even know if we have already this philosophy leading a new century: it is the limit of sight peculiar to a historical existence as we are. Then the only thing we can do is venture to propose some hypothesis based upon our own experiences.

For my part, I would like to propose three topics, namely liquidation of the solitary arrogance of spirit, rehabilitation of nature, and recovery of the sense of beauty. These are not three separate things, but only one. A liquidation of the domination by spirit begins with a recognition of its limit, which consists in the nature. It is important to think not only of the

inner or human nature but also of the being in body and even in environment. I understand by nature the totality which wraps the humanity in and makes them live. A recovery of the sense of beauty is important, because the beautiful including the artistic one is not something made but a sort of given grace. The beautiful, therefore, teaches the spirit that there exists something which transcends him. And I say "recovery" of the sense of beauty, because the Western modernity has lost it ever since the aesthetics moved its accent from the beautiful to the individuality of artists. It was just a tendency corresponding to the general trends of modern thoughts as described above.

My three points are based not only on a historical interpretation of modern philosophy, but also on some symptoms of change I noticed in the contemporary art phenomena. I mean the tendency to broaden the horizons of art: not only the Western art but also the ethnic and folkloric art, and not only artists but also amateurs practice the art. The general public is a sort of nature in the sense above, which supports and gives a new life power to art. From this renewed soil, we expect another great art to grow up .

To conclude with, I would like to add a point, seemingly quite special but in fact very general one; I mean, the importance of the urban construction. As I remarked above, the actual state of human civilisation requires the awakening of communal consciousness. I think the urban planning can do something in this respect. The space structure of a city may influence profoundly the relationship among inhabitants and consequently educate their conscience of communal life. The cosmopolitanism as modern utopia was born from the will to enlarge the conscience of familiar community life. Am I wrong, however, to find in this beautiful dream of modernity something analogous with imperialism? At least among the European countries, as opposed to the efforts of unification into the just only one Community, we can notice here and there people turn their attention to regional life. And as far as they consider the community life seriously, their attitude is sound and wholesome.

True "big art" (*architecture*) is not construction of particular buildings but of city planning, because it may shape the morality of inhabitants. I am dreaming of a city that arranges several spots for beautiful works of art and thus continues to talk to people that there exists something much greater than human spirit.

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