

The Centrifugal Shift

A Grand Theory of the Arts

John Glad

Abstract

Sociobiology postulates that behavior in all species is determined by natural selection, which favors those behaviors that promote biological “fitness” – the ability to survive long enough to produce offspring. The establishment of sociobiology in the 1970s led to the creation of a school of thought in the 1990s whose advocates, under the banner of “consilience,” has attempted to apply the methods of the natural sciences to the arts. Some of these scholars, who term their research “adaptationist,” “Darwinian,” “evolutionary” (as in “evolutionary psychology”) or “selectionist,” believe that their methodology will entirely supplant previous schools of scholarship. Such a unified methodology is treated here as unvalidated with regard to the body of art, at least as of now, leaving previous methodologies still standing, but sociobiology does explain on a macro level the psychological impulses leading to the creation of myth as embodied in *all* the arts, including music, painting, sculpture, literature, dance, and theater.

The efficiencies of human social structures have created surplus energies which in other species are devoted to augmenting fecundity, but the relative paucity of preprogrammed genetic instructions and the consequent constantly evolving forms of human social structures require that these energies be reallocated to ideology in order to maintain order within human societies.

The structure of the human state is hierarchical, promising the artist eternal life in exchange for loyalty (ants have no need of such a promise), and its traditional art forms can be characterized as “centripetal” in that they are stable over centuries, sometimes millennia (Egypt, China, Mesoamerica). Over time the artist begins to impute innate value to his creations and starts to innovate, undermining the former centripetal art in a graduated series of small departures from the canon. In so doing, he switches identity from artisan to creator, radically augmenting his status in the process.

When science undermines the promise of survival via the collective, the artist usurps the gods and creates his own mini-cosmos, innovation displaces the old methodological ideals, and centripetality is replaced by centrifugality. Rather than devoting himself to worship and expressing the philosophical and artistic ideals of the collective, the artist now expresses his

own feelings and engages in self-amusement. This is the great break between the Classical and Romantic views of life.

But the artist-god has paid a huge price; he has lost faith in his own immortality, and in his despair he begins savaging his artistic toys, creating atonal music and paintings whose very essence consists in the distortion of the object portrayed. “High art” is replaced by mockery, as in Dadaism and the “pop art” of the 1950s and 1960s. When the composer Carl Orff presented his rendering of a collection of 12-14th century poems in *Carmina Burana* and Andy Warhol displayed a painting depicting a Campbell’s Tomato Soup can, they were both essentially taunting art by degrading it back to the non-art from which it sprang and thus stripping it of its *raison-d’être*.

Whereas centripetality necessarily implies art of “high seriousness” – reverence paid to the deity and glorification of the king – centrifugality undermines centripetality through a gradual, insidious stylistic lowering, in which Albrecht Dürer depicts himself as Christ and Greek tragedy evolves into *opera buffa* and, still later, into Aldous Huxley’s “feelies.” Transformed from an inspirational tool of fervent devotion into recreation, the arts mock themselves, and Epicurus becomes the patron saint of modern society.

Since the awareness of death contradicts man’s preprogrammed biological instructions to survive, he is destined to endlessly repeat this cycle, re-establishing a new centripetal ideal, then undermining it with new centrifugal departures, and once again falling into despair. Modern civilization now finds itself at the end of one such grand centrifugal shift.

Table of Contents

A Definition of the Arts
Sociobiology (Evolutionary Psychology) and Art
Centripetal Art
Centrifugal Art
The Dynamics of Hierarchy
Time
Ideology
Knowledge-Communication
The Shift from Centripetality to Centrifugality
Technology’s Complicit Role

A Definition of the Arts

Criticism is badly in need of an organizing principle, a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology, will see the phenomena it deals with as parts of a whole.

Northrop Frye

Dance, folktales, novels, painting, sculpture, vocal and instrumental music, theater, verse.... What do they all have in common? What makes them “art”? What do all “arts” share? And how about such hybrid genres as opera, tone poems, Chinese calligraphy, synesthetic poetry, or comic strips? Popular expressions include “the art of war,” “the surveyor’s art,” and “the art of shoemaking.” *The Art of Cooking* is a popular book in American kitchens, and one journal featured an article asking “Is Wine Consumption an Aesthetic Experience?”¹ And it must be conceded that such phraseology is not without a certain validity.

David Clowney of Rowan University writes:

*The arts are like a large extended family. There are many family resemblances among them. Some recur frequently; others are shared by only a few members of the family, or are unique to one or two members. There is no one defining set of characteristics such that all and only "arts" have those characteristics. **So an attempt to define "art" is bound to fail.** [emphasis mine, JG]²*

Gregg Horowitz of Vanderbilt University writes of “the end of the ideal of a system of the arts”³ and cites Wittgenstein’s theory that the arts have no exterior boundaries and thus extend freely, merely sharing certain commonalities, so that again there is no unity, no possibility of definition... just a certain overlap. Kant himself stressed the specificity of the arts – that which differentiates them. He opposed the very idea of a system of the arts. Likewise, today’s “postmodernism” rejects grand unified theories. Victor Burgin’s 1986 book is entitled *The End of Art Theory*, and Arthur Danto’s 1997 volume even bears the title *After the End of Art*.

For an entirely opposing point of view one has only to turn to the Internet:

*Welcome to the Humanities 1, Class Introduction, College of the Siskiyous, Class goals...: The student should be able to summarize what the arts have in common.*⁴

*HUM 122 Introduction to Humanities, Johnson County Community College, Course objectives...: Describe what the arts have in common.*⁵

The situation is more than a little odd: Clowney and Horowitz (not to mention Kant) are not unsophisticated theoreticians, but at least some of

their teaching colleagues assume that the task that these three bury as impossible can be readily mastered by freshmen at community colleges.

The lack of an aesthetic equivalent of a universal field theory remains the Holy Grail. Lessing correctly pointed out in his famous *Laocoön* that the various types of art all have their own specific media. But to achieve a grand theory of the arts, we need to take quite the opposite tack. Such a theory must devote itself to that which encompasses all art forms and thus would have to operate on a plane underlying the specificities of language, sound, image, or movement. At the same time it would have to distinguish art from such non-art as cooking recipes, newspaper articles, or chemistry textbooks. At first blush the definition of art might appear to be found in non-utilitarianism. Horowitz refers to Kant's *Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck* – “purposiveness without purpose.” Certainly we know what the arts are not: they are not intellectual. This they all have in common. Art is a goal unto itself, unlike, for example, this essay, which pursues the goal of elucidating a topic that is separate from the article itself. Thus the artistic work is a self-contained entity.

Despite the professional theoretical pessimism, I resolved to at least attempt to pass the community-college introductory humanities exam. After all, the work of art is a product of the artist's mind and, as such, subject to analysis. I sit at my undersized school desk and scribble in the allotted space: all art forms fulfill a psychological utility – just like dreams. We arise from the kingdom of sleep refreshed, and in the same fashion the artist enables us to partake in his vision while we are still awake. Thus we can distinguish between **art as based on psychological utility** (entertainment, catharsis, ideological affirmation, sensory perception) and **non-art as based on objective utility** (an automobile parts manual or a weather forecast, for example). It is a position that, as I attempt to demonstrate below, leads to a rejection of the monistic utilitarianism of many “Darwinian” aestheticians.

By this definition, humor is art. But how about a soccer match? Is game at least partly an art form that pursues a goal assigned from somewhere outside the realm of art? Or does such a claim of artistry serve chiefly to pander to those teeming masses who place no value on Bach or Rembrandt? The response, tempting as it is to interpret game as art, is that sport has its purpose, albeit an arbitrarily assigned one – to drive the ball into the opponent's gates – and thus is quasi-utilitarian and at best only approaches art.

The study of the arts as a whole is not practiced. Students studying painting, music, or literature at a large university might never even meet. There is no word to connote the study of the arts as a totality. The artistic

process does include “aesthetics,” but art is not necessarily beautiful and its study involves a much larger area. I therefore propose two new terms: “artsology” and its adjective “artsological,” to which aesthetics, literary scholarship, musicology and history would relate much as microeconomics does to macroeconomics. Artsology is thus a superstructure that accommodates all aspects of artistic production, distribution, and consumption.

The artistic urge is not entirely medium-specific. An opera or a church service, for example, is intended to achieve affect via a symbiosis of acting, architecture, painting, music, and poetry. Even the church hymnals may be “illuminated” – an art form practiced not only by medieval Christians, but also by the Chinese, Japanese, Mayans, Egyptians, Romans, wedding the visual arts even to the artificial code of alphabet. Poets attempt to achieve synaesthesia, and painters defy Lessing by depicting movement in a lifted horse’s hoof, of a man rowing. If this German theoretician of the aesthetic had known about “motion pictures,” he would have been obliged, at the very least, to radically rework his *Laocoön*.

Proponents of *Geistesgeschichte* identify a unity of sensibility, if not worldview, linking the arts of a period. The association between Baroque architecture and Baroque music is more than historical accident. Can one imagine Rococo music in a Shaker church? Or the reverse – Shaker hymns in a Rococo opera house or even a Rococo church? Henri Rousseau’s imagined jungles and Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* seem to fit together as parts of a single grand mosaic. Beethoven, Goya, and Byron expressed the revolutionary events of the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.

Quality can be related to technical ability, but not necessarily. Many a skilled painter or musician produces terrible kitsch. Thus, a definition of art should also speak to the question of aesthetic quality. Brahms’ *Variations on a Theme by Haydn* and the *Happy Birthday* song are both musical compositions and thus art, but in terms of artistic sophistication they exist in different universes, so that my “limited-utilitarian” definition of art does not pretend to be satisfactory at more than a minimal level.

Hopefully having (more or less) passed the self-imposed quiz by defining the “arts,” I now wish to give thought to the method to be pursued in achieving the self-assigned task of describing the arts as a “system.”

Sociobiology (Evolutionary Psychology) and Art

And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,

*When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall, Then how should
I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?*
The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Partisans of specific disciplines within the humanities and the social sciences are often all too eager to defend their academic turf. The Formalists, for example, attempted (unsuccessfully) to ward off the intrusion of Marxist philosophers, historians, and sociologists into the realm of literary criticism and scholarship.

In contrast, the “hard” sciences have always been based on an assumption of the complementary nature of data drawn from different approaches, so that it is not at all unusual for physicists, astronomers, biologists, climatologists, etc. to compare data in the search for coincidence/contradiction of findings. Humanists, who generally prefer to see themselves as creative interpreters rather than slogging data collectors, have traditionally preferred eclecticism and pluralism, but now there is a new call for “consilience” across disciplines.

Compromised as it may be by past excesses and abuses, the view of art as an expression of the artist’s worldview retains its validity, and I attempt here to pair artistic scholarship in general and literary scholarship in particular with the discipline of evolutionary psychology so as to analyze the artist’s mindset and that particular aspect of his behavior which we refer to as “the arts.”

Sociobiology views human society as operating according to much the same principles as those observed in non-human societies, for example insect colonies. That is why Edward O. Wilson's landmark 1975 book, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, caused such a furor. Another objection will undoubtedly arise from its attempts to explain morality by disentangling nature from nurture. No matter how scientists ultimately rate the relative importance of these two factors, the search is for deterministic causality, not divine intervention. When all is said and done, that is what science is all about. Make no mistake about it: this is a worldview that assigns to traditional morality the same status as it does to the Easter Bunny.

Man’s biological beginnings are those of a predator/scavenger. Some predators, the bear or the praying mantis for example, are solitary creatures whose way of life is determined by their ability to hunt and survive as solitary individuals. Other predators, the wolf, the hyena, the warrior ant, have opted for a group strategy. A physically unimpressive animal, man

necessarily belongs to this latter survival type, and his success as a species has been entirely dependent on his willingness to act within the confines of family/tribe. This entails identifying himself as a member of the clan and displaying primary loyalty to it. Thus, it is biology that provides an explanation for the enormous popularity of spectator sports (surrogate war) and real war.

Like us (or rather we like them), termites observe division of labor, and thanks to specialization according to professions – builders, scouts, workers, nursemaids, warriors, mothers, etc. – they are able to survive and multiply. Individual survival is temporary but crucial to species survival, for behavior that favors survival of the individual over genotype leads to the extinction of that genotype. Thus the honeybee rips out its own abdomen along with the stinger in warding off the attacker, but in the process promotes the survivability of the hive, which consists, after all, of its identical twins.

What I wish to do here is to develop a coherent paradigm of the arts and do so by using as a springboard this new discipline of “adaptationist” studies (also referred to as “Darwinian,” “selectionist,” or “evolutionary”), even though the paradigm which I propose deals chiefly with art as behavior and only partly with art as art and thus does not lay claim to be the sort of all-encompassing model called for by some true-believer adaptationists. As just one example of the latter, note the short shrift given to disciples of Jacques Derrida by Joseph Carroll:

Deconstruction as a method pure and sufficient unto itself lasted scarcely a decade before giving way to the politically saturated discourse of Foucault, and radical political ideology has perhaps already exhausted the range of important social groups that can plausibly be represented as oppressed minorities. After the vast groundswell of feminism and the minor tides of postcolonialism and queer theory, no truly new political impulse has animated literary study now for more than a decade and no essentially intellectual impulse has been felt for something like three decades. The only major new subject area that has appeared in the past decade or so has been ecological literary study, or “ecocriticism,” in respect to its theoretical orientation this school has teetered uncertainly between postmodernism and a quasi-Darwinian naturalism.... How soon will the stale and etioloated rhetoric of postmodernism crumble from within?⁶

The tone of Carroll's statement is, to put it mildly, brash, as are such objects of this attack as Derrida and Foucault. If culture has become revolutionary, so have the criticism and scholarship that follow it. Twenty-two years earlier the aesthete Francis Sparshott warned:

Existing theories of art were framed by people most of whom were at least as intelligent and well informed as we are; a new theory is accordingly unlikely to annihilate them, and if it exists alongside them it will only add to the mess. Nor can we expect that future theorists, equally bright and knowledgeable, will be reduced to silence just because we have spoken. Order and clarity, it seems, cannot be introduced by superseding or preempting alternative theories.⁷

The Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky once noted that, while samovars could be used instead of hammers to drive nails, this was not their intended purpose, nor was it the most productive way to employ them. Many of the still clumsy attempts to apply sociobiology to the arts create the same impression.

Some proponents of evolutionary literary scholarship analyze literary characters as displaying such evolutionary principles as sibling rivalry, male bonding, and kin selection. For them the literary work is of interest only to the degree that it illustrates "adaptational" factors. Such an analysis can indeed be enlightening, but the sometimes silent, sometimes explicit assumption is that this approach can supersede literary scholarship and thus should replace it. I argue here that such claims are, at the very least, premature, for they reduce literary analysis to the status of a mere pedagogical prop for social-science teachers. And they have yet to be justified by the accomplishments of "Darwinian" literary scholars.

I have to admit that, in a way, my approach is analogous to theirs, for I too am about to present a psychological analysis to the reader – not of literary characters, but of authors. My intent is not to replace traditional scholarship with a different form of illustration of biological principles, but to establish a macro-framework for conceptualizing artistic activity. Note that "artistic activity" is not the same as "art"; it is what produces art. Knowing why the artist does what he does sheds considerable light on the work of art, just as knowing the work of art reveals a good deal about the artist. But the two should not be conflated. (In passing I wish to note that for the purposes of this essay I concern myself only indirectly with reader psychology, which I believe can be productively studied in the light of B. F. Skinner's behaviorism.)

Thus, the theory elaborated in this article deals with aesthetics, but it is not intended as an all-encompassing approach. Sociobiology treats behaviors intended to promote “fitness” – reproduction, kin assistance, reciprocation, mating strategies, parental investment, etc. (Remember the term, it will come up again later.) It is difficult to understand how listening to music, viewing a painting, or reading a poem can promote “fitness.” I do not agree that art can be reduced to a “cognitive process” that aids survival. The wholesale application of Darwinian explanations to the aesthetic sphere, treating art exclusively in terms of biological utility, has not only yet to be achieved, the very task may well be inappropriate. Failure to take this hurdle will not mean that “biopoetics” is a “failed hypothesis,” but simply that it is not as comprehensive a paradigm as some of its adepts would like it to be. Even though clothing and architecture can perform such utilitarian functions as providing shelter and enhancing sexual attractiveness, these are functions essentially extraneous to artistic essence. We are analyzing the functional qualities of a samovar to drive nails.

The beauty of any work of art appears to be governed by its own unique legal codex. Are we not using the same word to indicate entirely different phenomena when we refer to a beautiful woman and a beautiful song or painting? As opposed to traditionalists, both postmodernist and Darwinian scholars are intent on unifying aesthetics with the natural sciences, just as proponents of string theory would love to bring relativity and quantum mechanics under a single roof. Is this not “dreaming the impossible dream”? Everything has to be “verifiable,” and string theory fails to meet that criterion, its critics point out. The same criticism holds true for any evolutionary theory of art: How do we “replicate” Schubert’s “Unfinished” Symphony?

I have attempted but not managed to derive aesthetics from evolutionary theory, nor am I satisfied by any of the numerous attempts to achieve this goal by other scholars. By way of analogy, the human genome contains sequences inherited from bacteria that appear to perform no function other than to replicate themselves. Perhaps the aesthetic likewise does not fulfill any role in natural selection, thus bypassing the fundamental hypothesis of sociobiology. The jury is still out on the big question – the all-inclusiveness of Darwinism – just as there remain such unsolved problems in mathematics as the Goldbach Conjecture, the Riemann Hypothesis, or the Hadamard Matrix. I personally am skeptical that the monistic search for a seamless Darwinian web will ever succeed in explaining artistic quality.

Obviously the topic is part and parcel of the nature/nurture debate. Language-learning ability, for example, is postulated to be at least partly

genetically preprogrammed, but language being the chief mode of human communication, it clearly constitutes a fitness enhancer for a social animal.

How might art likewise be derived from fitness? I offer the following only as one possible hypothesis. The Russian émigré writer Boris Khazanov in interviews with me stressed that he viewed art as coalescing in the intersection of self-discipline and creative irresponsibility.⁸ Perhaps I am making a leap of faith, but for me discipline means structure – a characteristic of any artistic composition. Even instances of modern literature, music, and painting which flout traditional structures and seem to strive toward sheer cacophony make sense only against the background of the traditional structured arts. Their *raison d'être* is not so much that they exist but that they are different. Such creations would be inconceivable standing alone in time.

Thus, social animals endowed with such a structurizing penchant enhance their fitness. Let's call it the "Engineer's Hypothesis":

Engineering = art

But having advanced the proposition, I am immediately obliged to undermine it. A cement-block factory certainly is distinguished by structure, but anyone searching within its innards for an aesthetic creed would come away with only blistered palms and an aching back. Thus:

Engineering ≠ art

Nevertheless this does not totally negate what we can call the "Structurization Hypothesis":

Love for structure → art

The fundamental dilemma lies in the definition of art in terms of psychological utility when sociobiology is based on the search for precisely that characteristic in objective form. Like all the sciences, sociobiology is a deterministic worldview, behavior being determined by its ability to influence biological "fitness" – the ability to survive, if only as long as a spawning salmon, so as to reproduce. But for a Darwinian aesthetic to be successful, it must objectively define quality. What separates a brilliant artist from the throng of mediocrities? For the sociobiologist to use his field in analyzing aesthetics, he will have to convincingly demonstrate that artistic quality improves fitness. There is no reason to believe that either the

producers or the users of “good” art possess unique skill in following the command of *Genesis*: “Be fruitful and multiply.”

In any case, while the jury is still out on the feasibility of a unified theory, its advocates have yet to produce it. The arts can be compared to the screws holding a ship together. Although the vessel was created to travel from point A to point B, a navigator’s map tells us nothing about the boat’s hardware, which could just as easily been used in the assembly of a refrigerator. The fruits and vegetables employed by Giuseppe Arcimboldo to depict components of human faces are just fruits and vegetables outside the context of the painting.

The first edition of *The Selfish Gene* by Richard Dawkins appeared in 1976, popularizing the view of the genome as primary, with its bearer – the individual animal – running a poor second. But despite the readiness of the individual animal to sacrifice itself to protect the collective, this is a reluctant willingness. Thus the only intellectually developed animal has always and everywhere attempted to cope with his unique awareness by mythologizing both the universe and his own individual place within that universe. When *homo sapiens* became aware of his own mortality, that awareness stood in crass contradiction to a fundamental biological drive – to survive. With our larger brains we humans are better able than termites to satisfy our material needs, and we then invest this surplus energy in comforting *mythology* (which appears to be of little interest to our insect relatives). Residing in our brain's software, this mythology is called "culture," a portion of which is constituted by the various art forms. (By contrast, termites are exclusively hardware driven; there are no termite artists.)

A word of caution is appropriate here. Edward O. Wilson has speculated that the function of myth is to “excite pleasure.”⁹ This is incorrect. The pleasure derived from folktales derives not from their content, but from the artistic presentation of that content. Crudely retold, they would not achieve the same effect. Wilson’s fallacy is the same as confusing plot with artistic effect.

In 1947 Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer in *Dialectics of Enlightenment* argued that the Western world, impelled by the instinct of self-preservation, overcame the terrors of nature through myth. Of course, the inevitable neo-Marxian viewpoint of the Frankfurt School inserted itself in this assertion (“Western world” = capitalism), but the fundamental thrust of the mythologization analysis remains valid even without that particular slant.

To best appreciate the situation of the modern artist, let us contrast him, his worldview, and his art with that of the artist in a traditional society, where the individual perceives himself as a member of a mythologized hierarchy of beings. Whatever the nature of his society's constellation of gods, this pantheon is inevitably conceived of as eternal, as is the individual, who is convinced that he will live again after death, which is only a temporary passage, never a permanent state. Religious cults such as Jonestown or Heaven's Gate never view suicide as death; they are simply afraid to miss the train and want to fast-forward their own "resurrection." Christian fundamentalists who long for rapture-bringing Armageddon constitute the chief voting coalition maintaining the foreign policy of the world's current sole "superpower." We are dealing here with the very roots of human behavior.

Thus, man's biological imperatives allow him to accept death as a momentary condition as a member of an eternal collective, through which he gains immortality by expressing a (divinely dictated) ideology shared by all the people. By contrast, modern art sets the artist apart from the group. In contrast to the gray masses plodding along in their ignorance and indifference to culture, the Romantics conceptualized the artist as almost god-like – a "genius" who "creates" best during fits of brilliant madness. Moods evocative of this concept of a *Geniezeit* carried over into the twentieth century in Symbolism and even, revealingly, Futurism. At the Congress of Fascist Culture held in Bologna on March 30, 1925, the neo-Hegelian philosopher and self-proclaimed "Philosopher of Fascism" Giovanni Gentile addressed his ally, the Syndicalist Sergio Panunzio:

Great spiritual movements make recourse to precision when their primitive inspirations – what F. T. Marinetti identified this morning as artistic, that is to say, the creative and truly innovative ideas, from which the movement derived its first and most potent impulse – have lost their force. We today find ourselves at the very beginning of a new life and we experience with joy this obscure need that fills our hearts – this need that is our inspiration, the genius that governs us and carries us with it.

Looking back over history with the belated wisdom of survivors, perhaps we should consider politics to be an art form. But the hoary debate over the role of the individual versus deep-lying historical processes goes beyond the scope of the current paper. In any case, the Romantic conceit of

artistic genius will always be with us – perhaps because it does indeed possess a certain validity.

Within this context what can we say about the artist and the arts?

Centripetal Art

In traditional societies art forms are incredibly stable. Two Chinese landscapes may be separated by over a millennium and nevertheless be taken for the work of the same artist. A nineteenth-century Russian icon may be compatible with a Greek icon painted 1,500 years earlier. An Egyptian wall painting, a Mayan sculpture display the same stability over time.

Why is this the case? Can it be that earlier artists lacked imagination?

The response to this question is strictly functional: such artistic schools are ritualistic and liturgical in nature and by their very essence *centripetal* in orientation. The artist's insistent mythologization of death and his biologically determined collectivist, tribal roots combine to create a hymn to the collective, from which the artist draws strength and overcomes death. He may be reborn as a rock in the mythology of the Australian aborigines, but by bartering his freedom for immortality he will *survive* as a member of the eternal collective. It is an entirely rational tradeoff.

Funerary texts fit the centripetal tradition perfectly and can be argued to predate even *homo sapiens*, the flowers found in Neanderthal burial sites constituting non-verbal texts. Moreover, it is not possible to exclude the possibility that certain cave paintings may also predate Cro-Magnon man.

Ancient Egyptian funerary texts, commonly referred to as the *Book of the Dead*, are known to date back to the twenty-sixth century BCE, and a number of them have been preserved. The texts were originally inscribed on the sarcophagus but later were written on papyrus and placed inside. Decorated with art work, they consisted of spells, charms, and ritual passwords intended to aid the deceased to thrive in the afterworld. Some of them were highly elaborate: the splendid Papyrus of Ani in the British Museum is from the Nineteenth Dynasty of the New Kingdom and measures 78 feet in length.

Chinese handscrolls can be twice as long and usually impress upon the viewer the importance of the centripetal worldview by emphasizing the ephemeral in nature. When such ancient artefacts are preserved at all, it is often in sections cut from the original. The fragment of a centripetal work is exhibited as if it were a work unto itself, stripping it of the syntax which formerly lent it meaning. Such was the fate of a handscroll of Zhang Jizhi (1186-1216), which was taken to Japan, where viewers for the most part were unable to read even individual words contained in the fragment.

It does not behoove the centripetal artist to rattle the cage, to upset the boat. Rather, he wishes first and foremost to maintain continuity. He is the humble servant of the tribal ethos. To alter the worldview is to annihilate self; stability takes precedence above all else.

This is a worldview to be envied, an order of things which inspires confidence. The role of the artist is that of the skilled artisan adhering strictly to tribal tradition, which in its turn embodies the will of the godhead.

Ontologically, centripetal art fulfills an iconic function, affirming the unity of artist/artisan, divine/social order, and viewer. This is symbolic, never descriptive, art. Centripetal culture is not a matter of Jungian universalism. Rather we have here to do with archetypes that serve as guideposts for a given civilization. They are intended to shape a specific worldview.

While most centripetal art is intended to impress upon the viewer the need for obedience to the divine order, the large stone statues, or *moai*, for which Easter Island is famous, and the enormous Nazca line figures in the high deserts of southern Peru were not meant to be seen so much by people as by the gods. The receipt of such a commission was a promotion for the centripetal artist; his client was divine. Thus, the Sufi whirling dervishes in their dancing ceremony, known as the *Sema*, are dancing for God and in so doing they become closer to him.

Centrifugal Art

Let us now examine how modern society has overturned this worldview and the place of the artist, just as if he were a figurine in a box tumbling topsy-turvy downhill.

Modern science has undermined religious belief through its insistence on causal or phenomenological minimalism. While bold hypothetical constructions are encouraged, they must ultimately be validated by concrete data. In the words of the molecular biologist Francis Crick, the “god hypothesis” has failed that test; that is, individual survival is now perceived as pie-in-the-sky, and the artist/artisan has lost his former place in the universe, which was to serve as an instrument of expression of the divine order. The centripetal artist is Hephaistos, god of fire, blacksmith, and armorer of the gods, son of Zeus; the *centrifugal* artist is Prometheus, who stole fire from Hephaistos and usurped the role of Zeus.

The traditional (centripetal) artist may engage in non-descriptive aesthetic game, but such activity is always conceived as glorifying the grand scheme of things. Works of art for him are *expressions*, not of his own personality, but of the divine order revealing itself through him: *Quod licet*

Jovi, non licet bovi. By contrast, the modern (centrifugal) artist, is no longer content to see himself in the role of Jove's bull, but wants to be Jove himself.

Within the admittedly parochial contest of Western European civilization, the first inkling of the overthrow of God came with the cult of Mary, the mother of Jesus, when she was conflated with her half divine-half human son and venerated to the point of worship. An extension of this cult was courtly love, in which the knight "worshipped from afar" the object of his passion and announced his "eternal fealty" to her, composing the courtly poetry known as *romans courtois* and commissioning paintings, tapestries, and music. It was a fancy that lasted for centuries and is still partly alive in modern society. When the Catholic Church refused to recognize Mary's divinity, that left the artist alone as God's chief competitor.

The centripetal-to-centrifugal shift received additional impulse from the Enlightenment, Rationalism, and Humanism. Once nature was found to be governed by "laws" comprehensible to people, humanity's self-respect was immediately and vastly elevated. The individual might still be a "servant of the Lord," but now he had at last begun to comprehend the universe. Admittedly, it was a mechanical and imperfect understanding, but it was a huge leap from his former role of blind uncomprehending obedience. He had, as it were, been promoted professionally, and, taking pride in his new position, he began to sign his work. It was an important step in self-liberation – an emancipation that was ultimately to recognize no bounds and would have amazed those who originally set out along this path. The pious Bach would have been horrified at the thought that the irrepressible exuberance of his Second Brandenburg Concerto was undermining what had formerly been delight in God.

The question of centrifugality/centripetality is fundamentally one of teleology – the function and purpose of the work of art. Stability, the former chief quality, has abruptly come to be despised, replaced by evolution, which in its turn gives way to revolution. One artist may pass through multiple "periods," while others attempt to carry innovation to its logical extreme: each work attempts to be fundamentally different in technique than any other. Rather than serving god(s) and tribe, the artist – the former servant of the gods – has overthrown his own former deities and usurped the divine throne. Centrifugal art expresses his worldview and emotions rather than those of society. He may choose to dabble in aesthetic game for its own sake. The latter is most characteristic of instrumental music and abstract painting, which are not mimetic but self-referential in a post-structuralist sense: they "signify" nothing but simply relate to each other within a closed syntactical system.

Centripetal art attempts to achieve the aesthetic experience as a means of experiencing the Divine; Walter Pater's ideal of the aesthetic life and his cult of beauty present aestheticism as a goal in and of itself:

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy. To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.... Art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass.¹⁰

Thus, secularization lies at the heart of the centrifugalism invoked by Marinetti in his *Manifesto of Futurism*:

Set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums!... Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discolored and shredded!... Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!¹¹

But the price of godliness is mortality. Man's former mythology was the forerunner of science; it searched for cognition and gave him a framework of the universe in which he could understand himself. Now he finds himself surrounded by a black void. Perhaps his work may live on, but not he. Like any frustrated child he begins to savage his toys, rejecting the artisan skills which had formerly constituted his *raison d'être*. Dissonance, cacophony, clashing stylistic levels, and self-parody become the watchwords. Eliot's *Wasteland* reflects the ultimate chaos and disorientation of centrifugality:

*I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing.
la la*

To Carthage then I came

*Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest*

burning

The artist begins first by distorting the object portrayed (El Greco), then rejects depiction altogether (Mondrian), and ultimately rips apart aesthetic syntax itself (Jackson Pollock). The order of the day consists of free verse, the disembowelment of the novel, atonal music, art whose very essence consists in the distortion of the object portrayed. The artist attempts to create his own ideology, but it quickly degenerates into the meaningless of Dadaism.

While alienation is a frequent centrifugal theme, opposing the artist to divinely ordered society, it is occasionally also part and parcel of the centripetal tradition. In the case of the Aztecs, along with their predecessors the Toltecs and Olmecs, society is set off against the divine order – with loyalty to the latter rather than the former. Indeed many of the gory scenes which have come down to us in the form of frescoes and statuary clearly are in conformance with such works of art as Edvard Munch's "The Scream." Perhaps one should here distinguish on the basis of authorial approval/disapproval of suffering, albeit not on the basis of empathy. The aesthetic consumer may be invited by Eliot to empathize with Prufrock, but not the Aztec artist with the ritual victim. Nevertheless, most frequently we have to do with both approval and sympathy – as in depictions of the crucified Christ.

Yury Tynianov, the Russian Formalist, postulated that artistic evolution is a constant rejection of parents by children. In the process the children become the allies of the grandparents, against whom the parents formerly rebelled. The model proposed is one of a zigzag (the "move of the knight" in the apt phrase of Viktor Shklovsky), rather than the linear development of the other pieces. From this perspective perhaps art can be regarded as a spring which not only is winding in its progress but is even tied into knots. Nevertheless, Formalist theory constitutes a model of evolution and even revolution (that is, centrifugality), rather than one of stasis (centripetality).

Centripetal art is by definition functional. Centrifugal art can take either route. Centripetal art is an acquired skill. Centrifugal art strives toward originality.

No matter how culture changes, the preprogrammed longing for survival remains fixed in our genes. We live in a secularized world, but the belief in supernatural survival is not to be overcome. Aestheticians are generally after-game quarterbacks, but one may reliably depend on at least one prediction: the centripetal arts are destined for rebirth – over and over and over again.

The Dynamics of Hierarchy

All the arts are a search for order, for structure. Non-order is rejected as “noise,” which musically is defined as an excess of discrete sounds that we cannot hear individually. In the plastic arts, in dance, and in literature as well, art is structure.

The inference of Matthew Arnold’s most famous book, *Culture and Anarchy* (1868), is typically neoclassical. He views anarchy (centrifugality) as the opposite of culture and searches for “touchstones” by which artistic works can be judged. For Arnold centripetal art is of a piece with social order; centrifugality is chaos. This is a conservative (centripetal) worldview, and it is not accidental that Arnold sought after “high seriousness” in a work of art. A detached approach to centrifugal art might be entitled the “The Culture of Anarchy.” Centrifugality is carnival.

But Neoclassicism was an instance of, at best, only partly centripetal. After all, its proponents did not seek to resurrect the pantheon of Greek and Roman gods, but only the artistic (canonized) artifacts of that worldview. Significantly, Neoclassicism was swept away by the most ardent centrifugality – Romanticism with its cult of artistic (not divine!) genius, thus demonstrating that the surrogate centripetality of Neoclassicism was merely another fad in the grand flow of centrifugal revolution. Romanticism in its turn was overthrown by Realism, which reasserted an ideology extending beyond the artist’s inflamed imagination, only to be subsequently attacked by a throng of such quasi-Romantic centrifugalities as Symbolism and Futurism.

The polyphonic novel, as practiced by Dostoevsky, is an intrinsically Realistic genre that rejects the earlier simplistic ideological and personal schematics of naïve literature, such as that of the folk woodcarving and the fairytale, in which characters are clearly delineated into villainous and virtuous characters. Realism is – by definition – a rejection of a

preconceived or assigned system of beliefs in favor of a purportedly facts-on-the-ground reproduction of empirical observation.

Mysticism can literally define works such as those of Van Gogh or Faulkner, linking such disparate categories as the fantastic and the realistic. It could be argued that subordination to either of these “greater realities” is, in a way, centripetal.

Artists like Gauguin or Pollock pursue a personal centripetality within their own *oeuvre*, while Picasso, who experimented with a number of styles, lurched from one centripetality to another, thus stringing a series of such micro-centripetalities into a macro-centrifugality. The same can be said of modern secular art as a whole, in which we see schools of writing, painting, and music rise in popularity, only to fade away and be replaced by newer fashions.

Both centripetality and centrifugality are hierarchical. In the centripetal hierarchy the artist occupies a subordinate place in the hierarchy, whereas in instances of centrifugality he clambers to the top of the totem pole. But even then his position is open to constant challenge, not only from competing artists, but also from a never-ending stream of performers, interpreters, calligraphers, forgers, and plagiarists who seek to creatively bootleg his creations and thus usurp his divinity for themselves. The fashion designer depends on having beautiful models, but at some point they can “steal the show.” And then there are the critics and scholars who claim to understand the work of art better than its creator. Equally insidious is the concept of “found art.” The inherent tension in this dynamic power struggle challenges the artist’s hegemony; not only every orchestra director, but each individual musician seeks to establish his own creativity by departing from the composer’s intent.

This looseness reaches its apotheosis in ad-libbing and improvisation and is especially prevalent in those art forms which are inherently linked to performance. In Russian it is colloquially referred to as *otsebyatina*. Even without such an explicit intent, the tension is inevitable. In the folktale, for example, no single narration is identical to any other. But even in written literature the reader himself (and, of course, the critic-scholar, who is ultimately nothing more than a reader) can attempt to creatively perceive and analyze or interpret the work in a fashion that the writer would regard as seditious. Children are still searching for their bearings in life, and when their parents retell them the same fairytale, they will be “corrected” by the child if they even slightly depart from the original version. The poetic translator almost inevitably perceives himself as a poet himself, plagiarizing – in full legitimacy – from a colleague. With the passage of time the original

poem is preserved less brilliantly in the translator's memory, and upon coming across it years later, he inadvertently wonders for a moment who has plagiarized *his* poem.

Time

Centripetality presupposes synchronism, whereas centrifugality is inherently diachronic. The (traditional) centripetal artist either exists outside of time, or time has itself become temporary for him. That is, the universe has neither beginning nor end. If there is a "creation," it is a fleeting divine experiment which will be shut down on Judgment Day, but prior and subsequent to this celestial whim, time is a meaningless construct. The artist's role is to glorify the eternal order of things – be that universe pantheistic or monotheistic.

By contrast, within the centrifugal tradition of modern secular art, time is an immensely significant category. The artist sees value only in the creation of the new. What has already been accomplished may have been an achievement in its day, but to replicate past accomplishments is to prove the non-divinity of the artist-god, to demonstrate that he is incapable of creating a new universe, therefore that even his memory will die. He would not be a second T. S. Eliot, he would be Eliot's typist. Thus the quality of an artistic work within the framework of a centrifugal tradition (we could even use the phrase "anti-tradition") exists only within a temporal context.

Ideology

Ideology is generally synonymous with mythology and fundamental to the management of human society. In any conflict of civilizations, one of the first things that the conquerors do (after making off with the wealth and fertile females) is either to destroy the sacred texts of the defeated foe (a priority for Christianity, witness Europe, the Americas, Hawaii, Asia, Africa) or adopt them as their own (the Romanization of the Germanic tribes or the conversion of the Mughals to Islam). A third option is to intermingle the two mythologies. After defeating the Persian emperor Darius III, Alexander worshipped in his temples and then declared himself not the conqueror of Persia, but the new king. In Egypt he displayed no reluctance in depicting such deities as the dog king Anubis on his monuments. Judaism was similarly influenced by ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, and Hellenic cultures, and passed this heritage on to Christianity and Islam.

The artistic expression of such commingling is usually not a fusion of traditions, but, rather, a simple interpositioning akin to putting whole oranges and bananas in a bowl. Thus, while Egyptian mummies of the

Roman period were still prepared in the traditional manner, the faces affixed to the wrappings were copied after the Greco-Roman realistic tradition.

Since ideologies evolve, we are left with only their artifacts to examine as hard evidence. Even so, in the case of art we are unable to reverse-engineer specific artifacts sufficiently to determine whether they preceded ideology or whether the reverse was true. In other words, were amulets first worn as jewelry or did jewelry see its origins in the form of amulets? What is primary – decoration or ritual? Whereas the Formalists cautioned us as to the danger of overrideologizing the aesthetic, protesting that literature is not a no man’s land to be trampled by political scientists, theologians, historians, etc., Bakhtin wrote of “form-shaping ideology.”¹²

Intellectually the lone human being is virtually helpless. Like the ant or the termite he survives only as a member of the socium, but he differs from his arthropod competitors in that he is programmable rather than the product of read-only software. He lives, works, and dies strictly according to the mythology, ideology, and knowledge of his society. And he knows it. When the Khmer Rouge wanted to turn the clock back in Cambodia, their first priority was to destroy intellectuals, society’s living memory. In the familiar words of Bernard of Chartres (thirteenth century),

*We are dwarfs astride the shoulders of giants. We master their wisdom and move beyond it. Thanks to their wisdom we grow wise and are able to say all that we say, but not because we are greater than they.*¹³

Four and a half centuries later the essayist Michel de Montaigne was already expressing the new individualism:

*We seek other conditions because we do not understand the use of our own, and go outside of ourselves because we do not know what it is like inside. Yet there is no use our mounting on stilts, for on stilts we must still walk on our own legs. And on the loftiest throne in the world we are still sitting only on our own ass.*¹⁴

But Montaigne’s irony was not simply a statement of individualism; it was also a dig aimed at the wealth and power that former thinkers had served so loyally. Intellectual elites were already laying the revolutionary foundations of artistic centrifugality.

The Old Testament strictly explicates the rules of morality as stemming from their divine origin:

*In the future your children will ask you, "What is the meaning of these stipulations, laws, and regulations that the LORD our God has given us?" Then you must tell them, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with amazing power. Before our eyes the LORD did miraculous signs and wonders, dealing terrifying blows against Egypt and Pharaoh and all his people. He brought us out of Egypt so he could give us this land he had solemnly promised to give our ancestors. And the LORD our God commanded us to obey all these laws and to fear him for our own prosperity and well-being, as is now the case. For we are righteous when we obey all the commands the LORD our God has given us."*¹⁵

If any doubts remain, Old Testament logic remains as inscrutable as its consequences are unambiguous:

*He does not hesitate to punish and destroy those who hate him. Therefore, obey all these commands, laws, and regulations I am giving you today.*¹⁶

A product of chaotic times, the medieval serf prayed to the God of stability by serving his (divinely appointed) seigneur. As summed up by Thomas Hobbes:

Whatsoever therefore is consequent to a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without other security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall. In such condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea; no commodious Building; no Instruments of moving, and removing such things as require much force; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.

But even Hobbs cast centripetal Morality overboard:

Moral philosophy is nothing else but the science of what is good, and evil, in the conversation, and society of mankind. Good, and evil, are

*names that signify our appetites, and aversions; which in different tempers, customs, and doctrines of men, are different.*¹⁷

Thus was born the concept of "human values" – as opposed to values dictated by God. With time this centrifugal moral emancipation was to grow into Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian ethics and David Hume's moral relativism.

Whereas Medieval centripetal culture derived morality from divine revelation enforced with the threat of eternal punishment, the gradual removal of the ideological/artistic underpinnings of the center reached a culmination in the reappearance of atheism.

Civilization itself is the ultimate usurpment. When man learns to rationally comprehend nature, to control and direct it, he no longer has any need of divine revelation. Caligula and Hadrian declare themselves to be gods. Napoleon crowns himself, and Jacques-Louis David depicts the ceremony in a 20x30 foot painting. Comes the industrial revolution and a secularized world trumpets: "God is dead!"

The assassination of God was the outcome of rationalism. Spinoza and Leibniz, Descartes and Kant wanted to derive morality from reason and science. Despite their protestations, deism went into irreversible decline within the scientific community: a recent polling of members of the National Academy of Sciences indicating that only 7% believed in the existence of God – a view totally ignored by the man in the street, who remains attached to a personalized centripetal God.

Nevertheless, inevitably, deicide was followed by regicide, and it made little difference that Marie Antoinette may never have pronounced the fateful "Qu'ils mangent de la brioche."

Now a little physics: strictly speaking, centrifugal force is a fiction. Imagine the passenger in a car moving in a tight circle. The passenger appears to be constantly forced against the door, but in reality it is the altered trajectory of the car which is pressing against him. Remove the car and the force disappears. Remove God and Newton's first law transforms the artist into the master of his own mini-creation.

The theological power vacuum created by the assassination of God thus permits the creation of a new, ever-expanding polycentric artistic universe in which eccentricity is valued above all else.

Without the gravity of divine centripetality the only tension remaining is that created by artistic works between themselves. And as the distance separating them increases over time, their mutual relevance declines proportionally. But the strength of a gravitational attraction is determined not only by distance, but also by mass. Probably no serious writer will ever

completely escape the pull of Shakespeare, no painter or sculptor that of Michelangelo, no composer that of Beethoven. The Formalists protested that literary scholarship should not be reduced to a history of just the generals, but perhaps Matthew Arnold was right about his “touchstones.”

The usurping of God extended to usurping God’s kingdom. Whereas life had previously been depicted as a period of harsh divine labor in the service of the divinity, Thomas More laid out a vision of utopia on earth:

Therefore when I reflect on the wise and good constitution of the Utopians — among whom all things are so well governed, and with so few laws; where virtue hath its due reward, and yet there is such an equality, that every man lives in plenty.¹⁸

Whereas Saint Augustine had emphasized the pitifully limited capabilities of the human mind, the ideological foundation supporting the centrifugal revolution was the concept of rational processes accessible to man, not just God. Descartes, Malthus, Hume, Locke, Leibniz, Bacon, Harvey, Newton, Kepler, and Galileo liberated the artist from divinely ordered arbitrariness. The universe may be ordered by God’s whim, but it is His whim that renders the cosmos systematic and rational and also that man can best serve him by fathoming that rationality. And the artist rejoices in his newly discovered potential, replacing the passivity and restraint of Renaissance music with the exuberance of the Baroque. Later the artist is to go still further, usurping the self-proclaimed Divine apanages of inherited royalty with the self-rule of “republics” and “democracies.” But not only Marie Antoinette ends up on the scaffold; Friedrich Nietzsche declares that “Gott ist tot.” If Louis XIV declared that “l’État c’est Moi,” the Russian exile writer Roman Goul wrote:

One of the prominent Jacobins (I think it was Danton) while still in power wrote about the French emigrants: “You can’t carry your homeland away with you on the soles of your shoes.” He was right — but only about those who possessed nothing more than their shoes. Many of the French émigrés who preserved the memory of the heart and the soul — Chateaubriand, the Duke of Enghien, Richelieu — were able to take France with them. And I took Russia with me.¹⁹

But Goul’s reference is to a pious memory of the lost homeland. It was Thomas Mann who was to carry usurpation still further, maintaining that Germany was wherever he — Mann — was and that he bore German

culture within his own personality.²⁰ Thus did the imperial mantle pass from god to monarch to artist.

Formed by the artist's ideology, the artistic process in turn triggers user (reader, viewer, listener) appreciation. Efficacy tends to be maximized when the user shares the artist's ideology, but he can appreciate it even if he does not. This is not to equate artistic quality with user resonance; if all of humanity were to perish, leaving no one to listen to it, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony would remain a great work of art. The tree still falls in the forest even if no one witnesses the event.

Images are not permitted by either Judaism or Islam, and iconoclastic movements swept over Eastern Christianity during the eighth and nineteenth centuries and also over Western Christianity during the Reformation. Buddhist art was originally aniconic, that is, it avoided direct representations of the Buddha, but this practice was overcome in roughly the first century CE by the iconic representations that we all know. In its turn Buddhist iconic art influenced Hindu art, so that we have all seen paintings and sculptures of Lord Ganesha and his fellow gods and goddesses. Shinto is an animist religion, and its veneration for nature is the basis of Japanese flower arranging (*Ikebana*), shrine architecture, and garden design. Confucianism is not a religion but an ethical code, and Taoism possesses only aspects of religious doctrine. Thus their art forms are oriented more toward such intellectual postures as calligraphy and symbolism, rather than the anthropification of any divine pantheon – a frequent, but not essential, tendency of centripetal art forms, American Indian, African and New Guinean animist totems being only some exceptions.

The Old Testament seemed to anticipate the danger emanating from the visual arts:

*Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.*²¹

As was so graphically demonstrated in 2001 by the destruction by the Taliban of the monumental statues of the Buddha at Bamiyan and the outlawing of music and dance, the relation of art to religion is still being thrashed out today. Early iconoclasts intuited – correctly – that the artistic image possessed the potential to compete with the divine. Indeed when Byzantine iconoclasts destroyed divine images, their opponents, the iconophiles, perceived the act as an assault on God himself. That is, they had begun to venerate the image itself. The Polish icon *Our Lady of Czestochova*

is believed by the faithful to have been painted by St. Luke the Evangelist himself on a tabletop from Christ's home, and innumerable votive offerings are left before it, just as worshippers leave coins at Shinto shrines.

Clearly worldview plays a more central role in centripetal than in centrifugal art. The traditional artist legitimizes music by ideologizing it with a text and/or ritual, for example the musical organization of the mass during the Renaissance. Vocal music in which the individual words are difficult to distinguish would appear to deemphasize ideology *vis-à-vis* the musical element. It was no accident, for example, that the Council of Trent (1545-1563) objected to complicated polyphony and the slurred pronunciation of church singers which made it difficult for worshippers to follow the sacred messages of liturgical texts:

All things should be so ordered that the Masses, whether they be celebrated with or without singing, may reach tranquilly into the ears and hearts of those who hear them, when everything is executed clearly and at the right speed.... The whole plan of singing in musical modes should be constituted not to give empty pleasure to the ear, but in such a way that the words be clearly understood by all, and thus the hearts of the listeners be drawn to desire of heavenly harmonies, in the contemplation of the joys of the blessed.

But, as recounted by a Jesuit priest in 1629, it was a view that could not hold:

Pius IV, a most serious-minded pontiff of the church . . . determined to set the question of banishing sacred music from the church before the Council of Trent, and he had already mentioned his aims in meetings with various cardinals and other prelates. When word of this came to the ears of Giovanni Palestrina . . . he quickly set himself to compose some Masses in such a way that not only should the combinations of voices and sounds be grasped and remembered by the listeners, but that all the words should be plainly and clearly understood. When the pontiff had heard these works and had seen how useful they could be for the divine service . . . he changed his mind and determined not to banish sacred music, but to maintain it. This was told by Palestrina himself to a certain member of our society [that is, the Jesuits], from whom I heard it.²²

Since the ideology of centripetal music is immutable, the listener knows it in advance, and thus complex polyphonies that render the text unintelligible are now judged to be ideologically permissible. With the shift to centrifugal musical forms, a text must actually be communicated and thus vocal intelligibility becomes more rather than less important. Musical technique interplays with and even draws inspiration from message. Thus we see especially common use of word painting (the musical technique of having the music mimic the literal meaning of the words of a song) during the Renaissance and the Baroque.

There is a huge difference between polyphonic music and the polyphonic novel: Musical counterpoint is limited to technical components and does not intrude into ideology. Traditional centripetal art requires a unified ideology and thus would under no circumstances tolerate divergent views; thus the polyphonic novel is inherently centrifugal. Indeed the essence of the Dostoevskian novel, as elucidated by Bakhtin, is the ideological tension that constitutes the mainspring of the work and that threatens at every moment to rip it apart.

But even in centrifugal art, ideology can be crucial. Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* both clearly fit into the mold of modern centrifugality, but both are driven by ideology. In contrast *Macbeth*, *Don Quixote*, or virtually any novelette by Georges Simenon – all part and parcel of the modern centrifugal tradition – exist exclusively within the realm of human relations. El Greco's *Christ Holding the Cross* is infused to the core with religious belief, but *Still Life with a Fruit Pie and Various Objects* by his Dutch contemporary Willem Claesz Heda appeals strictly to sensory perception. Thus, while worldview is a must in centripetality, it remains only an option in centrifugality. When during the late Baroque purely instrumental music began to displace the vocal music that had predominated since the Middle Ages, this laid the groundwork for a deideologization comparable to the appearance of purely abstract painting in the early twentieth century. Whereas music had previously played a subservient role (praising God), it was now to be enjoyed for its own sake. It had become what the Formalists called a “self-valuable” commodity – somewhat like Kant's *Ding an sich*.

Much of art revolves around discord. The splendid icons of Novgorod come to mind with their helmets lowered, their spears jutting upward toward the sky, and their arrows mercilessly homing in upon the enemy, equally resolute in his posture. Such conflicts are generally backed up by ideology, and ideology is an inevitable *dominanta* of centripetal art. In the centrifugal artifact, on the contrary, more frequently than not the motivating force is

self-expression rather than ideology (Flaubert: “Madame Bovary, c’est moi”).

We must therefore distinguish between aesthetic and ideological centripetality/centrifugality. Most frequently the two are joined like twins at the hip, but this is not always the case.

Folklore displays distinctly centripetal tendencies, but not because of ideology. Since it is, by definition, an oral tradition, the “teller” mentally stores the body of the work in ready-made structures and phrases (Homer’s “wine-dark sea,” for example) so as not to forget them. These are what Richard Dawkins referred to as “memes” in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. But when the artist or narrator does not himself believe in his own creation, for example, when entertaining children, such fantasy should be classified as inherently centrifugal in ideology and centripetal in form. The artistic creator of such a work pursues no epistemological purpose. His purpose is not knowledge, but sheer entertainment.

Plato and Jean-Jacques Rousseau clearly took sides in the question in distrusting the theater as a perpetrator of illusion and untruth. Centripetal art aspires to the traditional value of verisimilitude, albeit not necessarily with regard to the perceived everyday world, but, rather, concerning a “higher” spiritual reality. Centrifugal art, on the other hand, can be a child of Coleridge’s “suspension of disbelief.”

Knowledge-Communication

Tolstoy in his famous 1896 essay “What is Art?” conceptualized art as a form of communication rather than of aesthetic gratification, but this reflected his own didacticism and philosophical views during his later years. When asked what he wanted to say in *War and Peace*, however, he responded that he could not reduce it further than the full novel.

It has become commonplace to speak of the “communicative” function of art, and certainly art does often transmit knowledge, but affect – as, for example, in an abstract painting (defined as color and shape over space) or in instrumental music (defined as sequences of variable-length pitches over time) – can hardly be termed “communication.” What do Mondrian’s colored rectangles express? Such visual art and music are largely – but not entirely – emancipated from ideology.

Ultimately, the poststructuralist concept of the priority of the signifier over the signified is valid with regard to centrifugal, not centripetal, art. The centripetal work, which is itself a signifier, is subordinated to affirmation of the verity of the Godhead and the immortality which the artist derives from that truth, whereas the centrifugal work is intended as a demonstration of the

brilliance, inspiration, genius, and even quasi-divinity of the artist, and thus the greatness sought after by the artist dwells only within the grandeur of the signifier.

The Shift from Centripetality to Centrifugality

The headstrong evolution of the arts is unambiguously sequential:

The verbal arts: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God → Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered" → Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy!"*

Music: *They performed the service of their God and the service of purification, as did also the singers and gatekeepers, according to the commands of David and his son Solomon → My lover is to me a satchet of myrrh resting between my breasts (Song of Solomon).*

The visual arts: *Now, son of man, take a clay tablet, put it in front of you and draw the city of Jerusalem on it → You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold.*

Ideological evolution occurs in a sequence of replacements:

polytheism → monotheism → divinely appointed ruler → middle class → "democracy"

Most primitive religions appear to be polytheistic. The most famous transition to monotheism was initiated by Akhenaton, when he proclaimed the visible sun to be the sole deity. Although his successors reversed course, the idea was picked up by Judaism and later by the Jewish heresies known as Christianity and Islam, albeit with the reservation of the Trinity in the case of Christianity.

Monotheistic religions tend to observe a strict demarcation between human society and god, who is usually described as "father" and who remains aloof from his creatures, acting according to a logic incomprehensible to them. By contrast, polytheistic belief systems describe the divine kingdom as a society with traditional societal issues and conflict

that make for interaction between man and god, as, for example, in the Mycenaean legend that Helen of Troy was born after Zeus raped her mother Leda, who gave birth to an egg, from which Helen sprang. As the saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt, and total centrifugality ensues only subsequent to the act of deicide. Once the prodigal God-slayer artist becomes weary of play, he regrets his abandonment of centripetal ideology and returns home, repentant but happy.

Purgatory being regarded as but a temporary state, Catholicism is a you're-with-us-or-against-us religion: one ends up passing eternity in either Heaven or Hell. There is no Switzerland where one can sit out World War II. As long as the faithful are compliant, centripetal art serves as a psychological carrot. The believer enters the cathedral, confesses, and takes communion, surrounded all the while by solemn and righteous religious images, art providing a face-to-face encounter with God. But such stability could not last endlessly. Hieronymus Bosch lived in a period of economic upheaval and feudal conflict. Sin – rebellion against the center – was everywhere, and Bosch decided to devote himself to illustrating the torments threatened by the Inquisition. Seeing that the old centripetality was no longer sufficient, he decided to employ the stick by creating an entirely new, that is, centrifugal, artistic tradition. Even earlier his horrific visions had become palpable reality in the Inquisition, and also in the witch trials that reached their culmination in Europe in 1550-1650.

But revolt against the religious hierarchy could not be suppressed. First came the Reformation, and then a frankly anti-hierarchical cult of nature. Henry Vane the Younger, an associate of both John Milton and Oliver Cromwell, argued for freedom of conscience for all religions. Both he and Milton championed the right of every Christian to read and interpret the Bible for himself – a decidedly centrifugal view. The establishment of religious tolerance represented a quasi-repudiation of religion itself, which was in the process demoted from the rank of exclusive bearer of divine truth that determined eternal salvation or damnation into the whim of an individual – freely chosen, altered, or even abandoned altogether.

On an ideological plane the personage of veneration is sequentially replaced:

god → king → nation → individual → artist → performer

The weakening of the Church and the increasing power of crowned heads of state constitutes a shift of emphasis from the Divine to the individual. The slippery slope commences whenever the ruler proclaims

himself divinely appointed and conflates his own personage with that of God, this act triggering a series of further usurpations. The struggle by secular rulers to wrest power from religion can enfeeble the latter, giving art greater autonomy. It is no accident that the Avignon papacy of the fourteenth century was followed in the fifteenth century by the Renaissance. The free-spirited William Shakespeare was fortunate to first see the light of day just three decades after Henry VIII created a national church independent of Rome.

Knowledge follows a parallel route:

revelation → scientific discovery → self-knowledge

The philosophical foundations for the denial of God had been laid out even earlier by Baruch Spinoza, an epicurean determinist who denied personal immortality and declared that substance cannot be dependent on anything else for its existence, thus undermining the all-powerful nature of God. Spinoza was promptly excommunicated by his fellow Amsterdam Jews in 1656 and was fortunate to survive an assassination attempt.

Montaigne's *Que sais-je?* (What do I know?) was responded to by Descartes' *Cogito Ergo Sum*, thus overthrowing (centripetal) divine revelation: "Intuition is the undoubting conception of a pure and attentive mind, *which arises from the light of reason alone* [emphasis mine – J.G.], and is more certain than deduction." Liberated from divine tutelage-servitude, art transformed Descartes' epistemology still further: *Sentio ergo sum* (I feel, therefore I am). Edward O. Wilson:

*Self-knowledge is constrained and shaped by the emotional control centers in the hypothalamus and limbic system of the brain. These centers flood our consciousness with all the emotions – hate, love, guilt, fear, and others.... What then, we are then compelled to ask, made the hypothalamus and limbic system? They are evolved by natural selection.*²³

Art also has its own sequence:

artisanshship → creation → self-expression → game

Although the forging of any artistic centrifuge constitutes the ultimate revolution, the process is too complex to occur overnight in what biologists refer to as "punctuated equilibrium," but rather is accomplished as the result

of an accumulation of more minor steps along the slippery slope of gradual evolution. In its broadest outlines artistic evolution can be thought of as the transition from worship to entertainment, for example from chant and incantation in folklore to the folktale and epic poetry.

Once the ruler has muscled god aside, the next step is political revolution, which in the case of the West was instigated by an economic upheaval, introducing capitalism's blatant centrifugalism under the guise of the Industrial Revolution, which in its turn created a middle class economically independent from God's self-anointed regent on earth. No longer dependent on a single client, the artist was able to pursue a more diverse range of activity. Money was one more step along a staircase of creeping autonomy.

The anti-clerical nineteenth century became engrossed with the concept of national uniqueness. The infatuation went so far that some of the authenticity of many of the "discovered" national epics may actually have been falsifications, James MacPherson's *Ossian*, and the Russian *Lay of the Host of Igor* being among the most prominent. Certainly, Mérimée's "Serbian songs" were an outright mystification.

In the New World the cult of liberty was given voice in the derivative centrifugal slogan "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" replacing the former centripetal ideal of "Obedience and Resurrection." Curiously, centripetality and centrifugality were to be conflated in Russia and survive into the early twentieth century as "Autocracy, Orthodoxy, and Nationalism." ("Nationalism" is an inadequate translation; the term was similar to the German Romantic concept of *Volkstum*.) In a curious effort to direct culture as a conductor does an orchestra, the early Soviet-period bureaucracy attempted – unsuccessfully – to insert "class" between "nation" and "individual" by creating *Proletkult*.

Remember the biologically preprogrammed need to belong to the collective, replacing monarchy with the cult of the nation. But things had gotten out of hand, and the individual demanded *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*. In the meantime the no-longer-just-an-artisan artist had come to consider himself, in the words of George Orwell, as "more equal" than others.

If the king could act as regent for God, why could the artist not follow his example? Michelangelo's David and his central painting in the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in which a gray-bearded God and a muscular figure symbolizing man reach out to each other are emblematic of the Renaissance emancipation of man from God. David is youth, vigor and *self-reliant* strength. The ceiling scene is not simply a conflation of man and God, but depicts man as far more physically powerful than the grandfatherly God who

seems to be passing on his authority to him. Leonardo was to make a huge step further, dissecting man and presenting him as a piece of machinery.

One of the key principles of propaganda and advertising theory is that persons being manipulated remember the information imparted to them in the process but forget its source. Thus, works of art are intended to communicate and illustrate the grandeur of God or ruler, for example in architecture, but the regimes and even the pantheons of gods they are intended to honor can be replaced, leaving behind the information – the buildings. The Hagia Sophia was converted to a mosque, and Hatshepsut's name was scratched from her monuments. If the name of the composer, sculptor, playwright, novelist, or architect is forgotten, the work of art escapes its informational mission altogether and comes to exist as an entity unto itself. If the artist's name is preserved, it can become more weighty in cultural consciousness than that of the ruler. Pope Urban VIII is now remembered chiefly as Bernini's patron, and during the late Soviet period it was quipped that Brezhnev would go into history as a minor bureaucrat during "The Age of Solzhenitsyn." (Both are rather improbable candidates for immortality nowadays.)

Many of the wealthy patrons of the arts commissioned monumental architectural edifices (during the Baroque, for example) simply to show off their wealth. It was only natural for the architects to feel that they were the true heroes of these creative acts.

The appearance of realism in literature and painting lent vigorous support to platonic nominalism, which maintained that "universals" possess no real existence beyond our imaginations. The "higher" reality of the heavens now found itself being muscled aside by the physically observable (and measurable). Medieval painting with its artificialities and lack of geometric perspective gave way to photograph-like effects. Individuals acquired personality. The chief literary genre – the Realistic novel – recreated for the reader an already experienced world, as opposed to calling upon him to render homage to a vast cosmos beyond his comprehension. No longer did the painting *symbolize* the cosmos, but actually served up its own cosmos in believable portraits, still lives, and landscapes. It was just one more milestone in the emancipation from the thematics and methodology of centripetal art.

Once the artist has declared his autonomy, the next step is for his work to acquire an existence of its own. The assignment of a title to the work of art – music, literature, or painting – presupposes a value that is autonomous *vis-à-vis* mythology. During the nineteenth century, "program music" became increasingly popular, in which composers replaced the former

centripetal ideology's read-only software with write-over software in the form of sound metaphors that they composed themselves. In this connection see Wimsatt's and Beardsley's *intentional fallacy*: "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art."²⁴ Or, much in the same vein, Roland Barthes ("The Death of the Author")²⁵, the Russian Formalists, Anglo-American New Critics, and the neo-Aristotelian Chicago critics all agreed: the quality of an artistic machine must necessarily be judged strictly by how well it functions according to *its own* immanent laws. But how the inventor psychologically conceived his creation demonstrates its artistic genesis, albeit not its artistic efficacy. These are entirely separate and independent questions.

The logic for applying sociobiology to literary works can be laid out quite simply:

- 1) The behavior of biological creatures is determined by the degree to which these behaviors, directly or indirectly, influence "fitness."
- 2) Art, including literature, is the product of such behavior.
- 3) Scholars should not predicate an artistic universe separate from the laws of science.
- 4) Literary scholarship should be "Darwinian" ("evolutionary," "adaptationist," "selectionist").

The syllogism is indeed tempting, for it assumes a dovetailing of disparate knowledge. Who could possibly reject such a fundamental assumption of all of science? Previous literary scholarship now finds itself lumped together with creationism and people who believe 1930s black-and-white science fiction films in which bearded cavemen wearing animal hides use sharpened sticks to fight off toothy, disagreeable dinosaurs.

But there is a leap of faith here which can be illustrated by a fairly primitive practice. Many, perhaps most, college bookstores discreetly offer a selection of slender booklets that provide reasonably accurate plot summaries of "the Classics" for student "customers" or "clients" (this is not humor on my part, but phraseology favored by a number of well-known institutions of higher learning) whose primary motivation does not extend further than receiving a grade, or at least course credit. I know of no "Darwinian" analysis of a literary work that is not equally applicable to the plot summary. If such scholarship cannot distinguish between *War and Peace* and its ninety-page synopsis, we are still far indeed from the

purportedly imminent “paradigm shift,” for we have lost that which is most important, perhaps even the only thing that is important.

The basic hurdle faced by “biopoetics” is demonstrating the unity of the artist and his creation. If the artist creates his own universe, can we be sure that the laws of our “objective” universe are applicable there as well? Personally I am deeply opposed to and even repelled by such metaphysics, but at the same time the plot-summary argument must be answered if sociobiology is to be judged applicable, not just to the author’s psychology, but to his literary creation.

The existence of unique national artistic traditions still further undermines the claims of Darwinist scholarship. Can it be that the Chinese are so biologically different from Caucasians as to explain the chasm between Chinese and Western music? And how can we possibly explain the difference between Russian and American musical traditions, or between German and French?

The argument is equally strong only at the level of individual talents. The history of art is, after all, a history of generals. Would not Russian and Spanish literature not have been radically different if Pushkin and Cervantes had died of smallpox as children? Just think of the influence exercised by Picasso and Van Gogh on painting. If art is so biologically explainable, why was the accident of the birth of these great artists so crucial? Without the “Mighty Handful” (*moguchaya kuchka*) – Balakirev, Borodin, Cui, Mussorgsky, and Rimsky-Korsakov – would a Russian musical tradition even exist? We cannot imagine how the history of music would have been altered if Mozart, Schubert, and Chopin had not died while still young men. Where would modern music be without Stravinsky? The list is endless. Darwinian criticism has a contribution to make, but the all-inclusive nature of some of its claims may well discredit it in the eyes of many.

Neoclassicism had prescribed “rules” for creating according to cookie-cutter recipes in the pursuit of an ideal of abstract beauty modeled after great works of the past. It was Romanticism that achieved the decisive turning point in the emancipation from centripetality. An associate of the “freethinker” Thomas Paine, William Blake programmatically rejected centripetality, usurping for himself the title “Maker”:

*I must Create a System. or be enslav'd by another Mans
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create²⁶*

Prior to the nineteenth century works of art, music, and literature could readily be identified by period. With the arrival of Romanticism each artist attempted to make his work different from that of his contemporaries. Thus, centrifugalism radically undermined “period culture.”

The transition from vocalic to instrumental music represented an escape from the intermediation of words. Whereas melody had been mandatory in Baroque and Classical compositions, the Romantics gradually broadened their palette beyond melody to imitation of the sounds and effects of nature and in the process were much more inclined than previous composers to write so-called “program music.” Beethoven called his Sixth Symphony (the “Pastoral”) “an expression of feelings.” Such an attitude was clearly centrifugal in thrust. Contrast it, for example, to Gregorian chant, in which the only emotion reached out for was piety.

At the same time the expansion of musical devices laid the groundwork for dabbling in technique for its own sake – music that would steal the scene in the twentieth century. This was a centrifugality that would find its analogue in abstract painting.

Romantic painting made a relatively tardy appearance relative to Romantic literature and music, and it represented a turning back toward centripetality, depicting the grandeur of nature rather than expressing the personality of the artist. For Spinoza, God was scarcely distinguishable from Nature, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau delved still further into this mindset with his cult of nature and condemnation of artistic vanity. Thus the Romantic painters – Aivazovsky and Turner, Constable and Friedrich – devoted themselves to delighting in the new pantheistic deity, giving preference to land- and seascape over portrait painting.

Centripetal art is essentially fantasy – an escape into a different world. By contrast, Realism focused its attention on the data of real-life experience, targeting an aesthetic experience based on recognition of the familiar. The movement from fantasy to that which had been experienced shifted the center of gravity from the world of God to the world of man still further and, in so doing, validated the independence of the latter from the former. Such a shift is generally characteristic of periods of secularization – for example in ancient Roman and fifteenth-century Dutch landscape and realistically rendered portrait painting. Pious and intimately familiar with the Holy Scriptures, Rembrandt wanted to dedicate himself to illustrating the Bible but ended up interpreting the Biblical world through images of what he saw around him and, more often than not, simply depicting the secular world in which he lived.

Once the centrifugal shift gains momentum, the now all-powerful artist may then engage in science fiction or Latin American-style fantasy, but he does so with a Coleridgean conscious sense of disbelief entirely different from the simple guilelessness of medieval audiences observing morality plays where the people grew so angry with a play's villains that they physically attacked the actors playing those roles.

Centrifugality is essentially secular. In theater this transition away from the center has its origins in the shift of stress from the Divine topic to human emotion and experience. The movement from ecclesiastic to secular music, as for example in the blossoming of the madrigal in Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century, represented not so much an immediate radical change in musical technique as a thematic shift alien to the ecclesiastic composer. The previous musical techniques were largely preserved, but instead of lauding the godhead, the musician now dwells upon his own personal feelings, sometimes rebuking his beloved – not for disloyalty to the deity, but to the musician – and sometimes failing to rejoice in his own passage to the afterworld in accordance with the Divine plan, or even mourning his own death. Thus ideological (thematic) change precedes formal evolution.

Whereas both form and content are fixed over time in purely centripetal art, evolution is characteristic of the centrifugal arts on all planes. Centrifugalization commences when either form or content starts evolving. In the process one may dominate the other, or the aesthetic process may consist of an interplay of the two on an equal footing. For example, content enjoys hegemony over form in the Realistic novel and in photography, while the reverse is generally true in modern painting. Opera and metered, rhymed verse emphasize interplay. Once the divinely ordered Humpty Dumpty crosses his legs the relationship of the artistic nuts and bolts that hold him together shifts and his eventual fall becomes inevitable. Not the king's men but he himself will glue his shattered body back together over and over again, but he will never reconstitute himself as he originally was. Nor will he wish to do so. The madrigal does not revert to plainchant but instead develops into opera.

The partial overthrow of centripetal by centrifugal art is illustrated in the replacement of the Neo-Classicism's "rules" by Romanticism's "organic unity." That is, whereas in Classicism the point of reference stands outside the work and dictates the dynamics of the work, in Romanticism the work represents a universe unto itself, and is thus adjudicable according to its own inner dynamic. Curiously, whether drama was viewed as a bridge between humanity and the godhead (Schlegel, Hegel, Nietzsche) or its

purpose lay in revealing the chasm separating these two worlds (Schleiermacher, Schopenhauer), Romantic critics still could not renounce their dei-centripetal vision of the universe. Even when Romanticism was overthrown in its turn by Realism, the point of reference still remained outside the work, shifting from the metaphysical to observed reality, keeping the artist in the thrall of a universe existing outside the cogs of the artist's mind. Symbolism was essentially a neoromantic phenomenon, and only in the twentieth century did the artist really make his bid for personal divinity in such movements as Futurism, Surrealism, or Expressionism, shifting the point of reference from an outside reality to his own fantasy. A still further shift of the point of reference is constantly taking place in the theater, in one direction or another, in the emphasis on performance and live action. *Bel Canto* opera and jazz improvisation go even further, canonizing performance over composition. The performer usurps the composer.

As pointed out by Eric Rabkin, folklore is all about obedience.²⁷ Cut free from the wolf's stomach, Little Red Riding Hood promises to obey her mother and not dawdle with strangers in the forest. In the *Edda* Loki is punished by Odin and Thor for failing to heed Thor's command not to break any of the bones of the slaughtered and roasted goats (when Thor resurrects them to pull his chariot through the sky, one is limping). In Russian folk epics (*byliny*) Nightingale the Bandit is shot down from his perch of seven oaks by Ilya of Murom and taken as a trophy to the Great Prince Volodomir of Kiev, where he whistles too loudly for Ilya, who decapitates him on the spot.

Syncretism in the arts was an expression of centrifugality, in which poets, musicians, and painters attempted to replicate the effects of each other's media. In contrast to Brahms, who refused to step beyond his strictly defined medium, Wagner achieved his massive popularity as a composer of program music. In the process the arts ceased to be dei-referential but instead became self-referential. But protection of one's own turf will always be with us. When the extravagant Russian Futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky came down from the stage, having given a particularly boisterous reading, Osip Mandelstam, who favored far more intimate genres, commented: "Stop it, Mayakovsky, you're not a klezmer band."

Centripetal art is confirmation of the glory and magnificence of its reference point – God, or perhaps the king or emperor whom he has appointed as his earthly deputy. Centrifugalism plays the Judas to this single-minded purpose, rejecting Paul's dictum: "the just shall live by faith"²⁸ – first by deviating from its role of confirmation of the godhead, and then by overthrowing it, replacing it with treasonous artistic self-expression

(the religious Baroque degenerates into the secular rococo), and culminates in the replacement of self-expression with formal experimentation for its own sake (abstract art and instrumental music).

Technology's Complicit Role

A fundamental motivation of the first artists was to create a historical record for posterity – a function still in evidence today but now retained largely for ceremonial purposes, as, for example, in a portrait or bust of a political leader. Early societies had not yet invented writing, much less moveable type, and the individual's life span was brief. How else could an institutional memory be created? The epos, an oral genre, was the transmitter of both mythology and historical fact. Rhythm, the antecedent of music, facilitated memorization. Generations of music students recall the first chords of Schubert's "Unfinished Symphony" by remembering the doggerel line "This is... the symphony... that Schubert wrote but never finished." As for dance and theater, they provided a medium in which the information could be passed on to future generations, thus creating the accumulation of knowledge that has made civilization possible and is the source of human success in competing with other species that are generally stronger and more fecund.

The distinction between utility and non-utility is a modern conceit, a luxury unknown to former societies in which the two functions were inseparable. Folktales, incantations, magic spells, chanting, even the tracing of a human palm on a cave wall created an inter-generational handoff of information. Amusement and recreation came to the forefront only when technology provided a more efficient vehicle for the transmission of information.

Technology creates new artistic possibilities. *War and Peace* is too long to exist within a strictly oral tradition. If it did exist as an oral work, it would doubtless have turned out quite differently from what Tolstoy composed. Music had been restrained in passing through the shift by the limitations of the harpsichord with its relatively small range, but the invention of the piano opened up an entire gamut of new possibilities – exploited by Beethoven so brilliantly that music would never remain the same. Michelangelo's technique would have been unconceivable to primitive African sculptors. Indeed, the very concept of the "primitive" is defined by the absence of sophisticated technique. "Primitive" artists generally do not perceive their work as "primitive." Art is "primitive" only when created subsequent to the appearance of technique; otherwise it is "the state of the art."

But technology not only modifies art, it also creates entirely new genres. Painters competed in achieving realistic effects – but only up to the appearance of color photography. The aerodynamically inspired architecture produced by the studio of Zaha Hadid would have been technically impossible for the ancient Egyptian or Roman architect. The pony has been outrun by the locomotive. And technology could also make the arts vastly more accessible, witness cinema and recorded music.

Once technology had stripped the artist of his former function of historian, he could at most attempt to become an *illustrator*, or, alternatively, an *expresser*; moreover that “expression” was often limited to his own personal emotions – the ultimate centrifugality.

Why does the bear cross over to the other side of the mountain? Because it’s there, and because he can. No sooner does technology make a new art form even conceivable, that art form is created. I recall decades ago reading a science fiction story about a non-human society that was deaf but endowed with an incredibly developed sense of smell. Its composers, who created “symphonies” of aromas, were terrorized upon encountering a human female who used perfume.

Technology is one of the motors of centrifugality.

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