





## FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION (1980)

Since this book was first published (in 1962), the situation of contemporary art has continued to change. These changes are also reflected in the theoretical and programmatic statements of artists. However, in view of the most recent developments in art, we must conclude that the problem highlighted in this book has lost none of its relevance. This is the problem of non-aesthetic art, which we encounter both in the statements of important modern artists and in the theories of beauty in antiquity.

Their starting points are parallel: rejecting any aesthetic conception in which art appears only as one possible interpretation of reality, as just another interpretation and, therefore, subjective. There is another striking aspect to this parallelism: both the modern artists we cite here and the authors of Antiquity distinguish between the 'entity' (nature, people, things) that we see in everyday life and the deeper 'being' that underlies phenomena and constitutes the true object of art.

In the statements by modern artists on the problem of being that we refer to in this book, there are two different tendencies. One understands 'being', the 'primordial reality' to which art must lead us back, as the obligation of human beings in the face of their own historicity. Art therefore represents an existential commitment. Poetry as 'anti-literature'; painting and sculpture as 'anti-art': this interpretation extends in various variations from Baudelaire to the theoretical programmes of surrealism.

The second trend requires artists to move away from representing "things" or objects in their works in order to reach the deepest essence of the original "being". Artists from "Der Blaue Reiter" belong to this trend, as do Kandinsky, Mondrian and "Suprematism" later on.

Thus, in relation to our problem, we find four fundamental theses: the distinction between 'being' and 'existence', the assertion that the task of art is to discover the original 'being', and, finally, the two different conceptions of this original 'being'.

The distinction between 'being' and 'existence' was formulated in antiquity, for example by the pre-Socratics, who also illustrated it with images.

The pre-Socratics understand 'being' as that which acts and grows (*phýein*) originally, like *phýsis*, but we should not understand this word in the sense of our current version of this concept as 'physical nature'. The *phýsis* of the pre-Socratics is that which arises, exists and perishes in individual forms, each different from the other; thus, "being" (*phýsis*) is not the same as the individual forms in which it appears, the "ents".

Ancient writings say: in the original *phýsis*, in the original "being", everything is at once the same and different, large and small, slow and fast. Consequently, being cannot be identified with any individual determination of *phýsis*: '[...] to be born and to perish is the same thing [...]. Light for Zeus, darkness for Hades; light for Hades, darkness for Zeus'.<sup>1</sup>

In the same *Corpus Hippocraticum*, "being," *phý-sis*, is defined as the identity of emergence and disappearance, that is, through a logical contradiction. It is significant that the author uses a metaphor to interpret being: "Some men saw a log: one pushes, the other pulls. They do the same thing, decreasing as they increase."<sup>(2)</sup> Along the same lines, Empedocles states that the original "being" can neither increase nor decrease: "And how could it disappear [...]"<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Hippocratis Opera*, ed. Littré, VI, 477 [Spanish translation by Carlos García Gual in: *Tratados hipocráticos*, vol. III, Madrid, Gredos, 1986, p. 27].

2. *Ibid.*, 479 [Spanish translation cited, p. 28].

3. Empedocles, fragment 17 [Spanish translation by Ernesto La Croce in: *Los filósofos presocráticos*, vol. 2, Madrid, Gredos, 1979, p. 261].

How do ancient texts interpret "being" in its difference from "existence"? We find the following answer: "existence" appears as "being" only within a *diastema*, in the "between" of space and time, that is, within limits. For example: in the context of research into the essence of a flower (therefore, only about the flower as a particular entity), it is possible to talk about emergence, existence and death. But these aspects are meaningless in relation to plant life as a whole, in which the death of the flower and the emergence of the fruits are part of the becoming (*phýein*) of the plant cycle. The isolated aspects of life and death, which concern the particular entity, are left aside here. Furthermore, the *diastema* in which an 'entity' appears (or exists and dies) is very different in the vegetative, sensitive and rational realms.

In this context, we must discuss a philosophical exposition of the essence of art, which in our times has considered the distinction between 'being' and 'entity' to be fundamental. As we have not addressed this exposition in this book, but we consider its approach important for clarifying the relationship between the conception of art in Antiquity and certain trends in modern art, we will discuss it below, as we consider its importance to be fundamental.

Martin Heidegger devoted himself to the fundamental task of justifying the distinction between original 'being' and 'entity' (the ontological difference).<sup>4</sup> He concluded that the pre-Socratics had already brought to light the scope of this thesis.

Furthermore, Heidegger establishes a very close relationship between this thesis and the problem of art when he says: "We do not come to understand who man is through some learned definition, but only through the fact that man confronts being, trying to locate it in his own being, that is, to put it within limits and a form and projecting something new (which is not yet present), that is, by poetising it originally, grounding it poetically."<sup>5</sup>

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4. Cf. M. Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, Pfullingen, 1957 [Spanish translation by Félix Duque and Jorge Pérez de Tudela: M. Heidegger, *La proposición del fundamento*, Barcelona, Serbal, 1991].

5. M. Heidegger, *Einführung in die Metaphysik*, Tübingen, 1976, p. 110 [Spanish translation by Ángela Ackermann Pilári in: M. Heidegger, *Introducción a la metafísica*, Barcelona, Gedisa, 1987, p. 134].

According to Heidegger, only art makes it possible for the openness of being in which the entity arises to manifest itself: "Thanks to the work of art, understood as being insofar as it is an entity, everything else that appears and can be found is confirmed, becomes accessible, interpretable and intelligible *as an entity* or as non-entity."<sup>6</sup> But why does Heidegger say that being is revealed through art and not, as tradition has it, through rational thought? How does

Heidegger arrive at this thesis, which Does it suddenly attribute a primary, guiding function to art?

Heidegger points out that ancient metaphysics, which begins with Plato's Socrates (and *does not* connect with the pre-Socratics, but rather breaks with their thinking), maintains that only rational thought offers us the solution to arrive at the truth of "being." In this way, the problem of logical truth takes precedence over any other philosophical problem, with the additional consequence that art and poetry cannot claim a prominent role in the philosophical sphere.

Heidegger contrasts this conception with the following thesis: the problem of truth arises where being is already given, specifically in the relationship between subject and object, which belong to 'being'. Therefore, the question of 'being' as the 'unconcealment' in which being appears (since all being is a specification of being; we say: man 'is', the tree 'is', the animal 'is') takes *precedence* over the problem of the truth of being. For the question of truth presupposes the question of unveiling, of the 'clearing' (*Lichtung*) of being in which being appears. Consequently, the original problem of philosophy *is not the problem of logical truth*, the rational definition of being, but the problem of the 'clearing'. In Heidegger's words:

The noun *Lichtung* ['clearing in the forest'] refers to the verb *lichten* ['to clear a forest']. The adjective *licht* ['bright'] is the same word as *leicht* ['light']. *Etwas lichten* means: to lighten, to free, to open something, such as clearing trees from a forest in one place. The resulting open space is the *Lichtung*. However, *das Lichte*, in the sense of free and open, has nothing to do linguistically or thematically with the adjective *licht*, which means *hell* ['bright']. [...] But light never creates the *Lichtung*, it presupposes it. However, the open space is not only free for light and dark, but also for sound and for the

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6. *Ibid.*, p. 122 [Spanish translation, p. 147].

echo that is fading away. The *Lichtung* is open to everything present and absent.<sup>7</sup>

It is within the 'clear' that things, people, gods and institutions arise; all of them are revealed in the historicity of 'being there' and thus make possible the questions that concern them. As we have already mentioned, Heidegger sometimes speaks of 'unconcealment' instead of 'clear'; in his opinion, this term reproduces the original meaning of the Greek word *alétheia*, which is a mistake to translate as 'truth'.

What Heidegger asserts is that the work of the artist, of the poet, is for each era the "clearing" of being: the "clearing" in which people, their institutions and their history appear, exist and perish, precisely because (as entities) they can never exhaust being in their power.

In relation to the theses of modern artists discussed in this book, we find here the most complete justification of the thesis that art and poetry are not "entertainment," something purely "literary," but rather have a fundamental function and meaning.

Heidegger's fundamental thesis tells us that through art, through its projects, the original historicity of man (being in its variety of meanings) is revealed. This means two things: on the one hand, that being appears in the "light" of the power of being through art; on the other hand, that since being does not exhaust itself, it remains hidden from unhidden being.

Exhibitions on tradition are only justified when they help us to consider the issues that really concern us, but not when they are merely dead, purely historical documentation. I believe that Heidegger's theses, which we have briefly alluded to, should be taken into account both when reading ancient texts and when reflecting on the issues raised by the modern artists we have mentioned.

E. GRASSI  
*Munich, 1979*

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7. M. Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens*, Tübingen, 1976, p. 72 [Spanish translation by José Luis Molinuevo in: M. Heidegger, *Tiempo y ser*, Madrid, Tecnos, 2011, pp. 105–106].



## FOREWORD

This contribution to *The Theory of Beauty in Antiquity* is, on the one hand, the first volume of a four-volume history of aesthetics (vol. II: The Middle Ages, by R. Assunto; vol. III: Humanism and the Renaissance, by E. Garin; vol. IV: The 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries, by R. Assunto).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, it attempts to establish connections with certain issues in contemporary art. The latter may surprise some readers, so the author feels it appropriate to begin by briefly justifying his approach.

When studying ancient theories of beauty in major historical expositions on the 'aesthetics' of Antiquity (e.g. those of J. Walter and E. Müller), it can be seen that, although they highlight the non-aesthetic nature of the ancient concept of beauty, they retain the term 'aesthetics' as a matter of course. These authors did not consider it worth mentioning that the rudiments of aesthetics in the strict sense did not exist until Aristotle (and certainly not in Plato) and that they then disappeared surprisingly and completely in Hellenism.

The non-aesthetic character as a decisive feature of the philosophy of beauty in Antiquity was what prompted me to wonder whether, from the anti-aesthetic attitude of certain trends in contemporary art, a living relationship could be established with the 'aesthetics' of

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1. This statement applies to the original German edition of this book, but not to the present Spanish translation. The German title of this book is *La teoría de lo bello en la Antigüedad* (The Theory of Beauty in Antiquity), and it is the first volume of a four-volume history of aesthetics. When preparing the Italian edition of this book in 1972, the author changed the title, and this new title is the one we use in this Spanish edition (cf. notes 2 and 16 of the 'Presentation' by Emilio Hidalgo-Serna). In addition, we have added the preface to the second German edition, from 1980. [Translator's note]

Antiquity. If this were the case, it would open up a new path both for understanding ancient tradition and for judging certain problems in modern art.

This idea is in flagrant contradiction with the general title "history of aesthetics", to which this volume must adapt as the first part, relating to Antiquity. This contradiction is caused by tradition; traditional frameworks must be used in order to demonstrate that they are obsolete, and this must be done through research that links the anti-aesthetic features of certain current theories of art and beauty to the non-aesthetic nature of ancient concepts of beauty.

*A further question concerns the relationship between the theoretical study of beauty and art on the one hand, and artistic creation in antiquity on the other, that is, whether and to what extent theories influenced works of art. The answer to this question cannot be the subject of this work.* The practice of art and the creation of works that embody beauty do not necessarily bear any analogy or interrelation to philosophical ideas. Furthermore, the creation of works that we today consider to be 'art' (by what right will be the subject of this research) historically predates the emergence of theories of beauty by a long way.

I also think it is advisable to avoid two further misunderstandings. References to contemporary art (I would like to emphasise this in particular) *are in no way intended to provide an overall characterisation*, which is neither my role as a researcher nor appropriate to our subject. This work has nothing to do with art history, since in it the interpretation of ancient testimonies leads to results that can contribute to the understanding of the artistic thinking of *some* currents in contemporary art. Furthermore, this contribution also applies to the evaluation of sacred works from the Middle Ages, to which this research alludes only in passing.

Secondly, the results of this work should not be understood as a disapproval of the 'aesthetic'. If in ancient theories of beauty (with the exception of Aristotle) a criticism of this category is perceived time and again, it seems essential to refer to similar manifestations by artists of our time, even if they are no longer religious in nature, but profane. This does not imply an assertion of the superiority of these artists or their works over 'aesthetic' trends. It is simply a matter of comparing theories and ways of thinking, and the result is that

Some artists of the "modern era" (regardless of how we evaluate their works) have defended ideas about the ontological function of art that seem similar to those of Antiquity, and they have done so in a surprising way, inexplicable by influence and without being aware of it.

The idea of mentioning this in the prologue was suggested to me by a correspondence with my friend Hugo Friedrich, to whom I owe (as I also owe to W. Szilasi and W. Hess) important observations on this work. I must quote Friedrich's defence of aesthetics:

I cannot live without poetry, but I am far from feeling "Existentially committed" to it. I enjoy the plurality of poetic and artistic possibilities because they are the necessary plurality of the relationship between the spirit and existence, which can never be realised in a single point: the playful relationship, the relationship of escape, the interpretative, singing, mourning relationship, and a thousand other relationships. To find this plurality, I have a scholarly curiosity, a curious erudition, [...] I read Aristotle's 16th-century Latin commentaries to find out which of them is the initiator of Baroque Mannerism, I dig into Baudelaire's Satanism in search of modern channels of Manichaeism, I discover some refinements in 12th-century poetic technique, [...] I meditate on the lyrical question, I do this and that. In short: I am exactly the aesthete without existential commitment against whom so many profound and rabid ideas have been hurled in Germany.

No, that is not the case (and in this prologue I will allow myself to adopt a personal tone); it is not a question of re-establishing a 'sacred existential commitment' on the part of Germany, but rather of discovering the *theoretical* relationships between ancient creations and *certain* trends in contemporary art.

The positions I defend in my work sparked yet another discussion based on an article I published in 1961 in the magazine *Die neue Rundschau*. It was a discussion with Hans Sedlmayr, who ultimately greatly limited several of his objections. I am very grateful to him for clarifying the issues in our debate, and I think it would be useful for the reader to summarise it briefly here.

Sedlmayr said that my subject matter refers only to *ideology*. of certain trends in contemporary art, but not to the *practice* of

"Modernity": "In practice, a dialectical shift towards the aesthetic, towards the purely aesthetic, is taking place as never before. Instead of works of art, the 'aesthetic object' appears, which is clearly seen in the fact that there can now be exhibitions in which self-styled 'works of art' are mixed with any *objets trouvés* from the modern world or from nature." In this regard, I must emphasise once again that my research (carried out by a philosopher, not an art historian) deals *only with theoretical manifestations* of beauty, both when discussing the present day and when discussing antiquity. The praxis of modern art does not enter into our approach. However, I consider it unacceptable to interpret the works of Mondrian or other theorists I refer to in a purely aesthetic manner. Furthermore, the Surrealists did not send their *objets trouvés* to exhibitions with aesthetic intentions, but rather to shatter the aesthetic attitude, as they continually emphasise. This can be demonstrated by many statements made by Breton and other artists in his circle.

On the other hand, Sedlmayr challenges my thesis that one cannot—to understand Mondrian's theory of 'new plastic art' aesthetically. Sedlmayr wrote to me: 'According to Mondrian, art will disappear once all modern life has become aesthetic'. I believe I have demonstrated in my work that this interpretation is inadmissible. Mondrian proclaims the struggle against everything aesthetic; he believes that the day will come when we will turn away from the apparent world in which we now live (and of which the aesthetic is a part) and move towards the primordial reality; then, art will be superfluous as an aesthetic element because human beings will return to living in that primordial reality towards whose elements Mondrian is trying to advance in theory and practice.

In order to avoid possible misunderstandings, I think it is very important to present a third objection raised by Sedlmayr: "I consider it completely wrong (a sophism that I can hardly understand) that works from periods that aspire to a magical or religious reality cannot *therefore* be works of art." This question belongs to the field of art science, so its investigation cannot be the subject of my work and I am not competent here: in what way can sacred and mythical works *also* be artistic? Nowhere do I say (and I am far from thinking so) that these works cannot be artistic because their in-

Attention is mythical-religious. Moreover, in many fields of human creation, works are produced whose intentions have nothing to do with art and yet allow for aesthetic consideration.

Finally, Sedlmayr reproaches me for "confusing the artistic with the aesthetic": "The artistic essentially transcends the merely aesthetic. [...] I cannot understand how a humanist can attribute a merely aesthetic attitude to the Renaissance. [...] The purely aesthetic has only existed since modernity." This question is probably only partly terminological. I believe I have demonstrated in this work that a work ceases to be mythical-religious in its intentions when it becomes the object of non-binding consideration or when it represents a subjective and relative interpretation of reality. Then its intention is no longer to manifest reality, but rather the *possible* interpretation of reality becomes the meaning of art, as Aristotle already formulated. This is at the same time the essence of every aesthetic attitude, in exactly the same sense as Kierkegaard still expounded it in *Either/Or*. Thus, the aesthetic is not a phenomenon specific to modernity, as Sedlmayr claims, but has existed as a theory since Aristotle's definition of art, as I have attempted to show in this work.

In this context, there remains the possible objection that it is necessary to specify—

As a humanist, I attribute "only an aesthetic attitude" to the Renaissance. I am well aware that most theories of art in the Humanist era were still determined by Neoplatonism through the influence of Ficino. I can understand how Sedlmayr's objection arises. In a brilliant article entitled *Zur Revision der Renaissance*, he has attempted to show how the concept of 'triumph' (triumph over death through resurrection) can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the affirmation of the earthly by Renaissance Christianity and the reappearance of the bodily perfection of Antiquity. But it is indisputable that from the end of the Middle Ages onwards, artists' works began to become once again a subjective interpretation of phenomena and ceased to have an ontological function.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that I have absolutely no intention of intention of "providing legitimacy to revolutionary modern art by means of noble ancestors in Antiquity".

as Sedlmayr writes to me, whereas modern art wants to start from scratch. What I want to do is simply show that the ontological problems of Antiquity can help us better understand the ontological efforts that some currents of Modernity have clearly expressed. At the same time, the fact that the representatives of these currents are completely unaware of the theoretical and historical connections, the fact that they believe they have to start *from scratch*, is a historical error that I am trying to bring to light through my work.

I would also like to note that in the first chapter, the section on 'the ontological meaning of beauty in Homer' is a study by Eckhard Kessler that originated in my seminar and was abridged by me; the German translation of several passages from Philostratus' *Imagines* by H. Herrig has the same origin.

H. Herrig. I am pleased to include these contributions because they arose from our joint study of the issues addressed in this work at the University of Munich.

I am especially grateful to Professor Walter Hess for the great effort he has put into the German version of my manuscript.

### **About the illustrations**

It is impossible to draw parallels between the development of the theories in this volume and a series of illustrations of works of art. There is no direct influence of philosophical definitions of beauty on the activity of artists once the mythical sphere is abandoned. This work attempts to show that the ancient theory of beauty refers to an ontological structure of reality. If one wishes to illustrate this position, one can only resort to works that expose the omnipotent order of the cosmos, primal and timeless reality, the sacred and the mythical, as well as testimonies of nature itself. As we relate the ancient theory of beauty to certain anti-aesthetic conceptions of contemporary art that have developed a new appreciation of natural beauty, we have included some illustrations capable of showing natural beauties of a 'non-aesthetic' nature.

# INTRODUCTION

## 1. Are the fields of beauty and art identical?

### *The task*

Our research deals with the theory of beauty and art in Antiquity. The word commonly used for this is "aesthetics", which comes from the Greek (αἰσθησις = perception) and originally meant the doctrine of sensory perceptions. This meaning was lost, at least since Baumgarten (1714–1767), and the term 'aesthetics' now refers to theories about the essence of art and beauty that have developed throughout history.

However, our company is not driven by purely historical interests, but ultimately aims to answer the question "What is art?" and falls within the scope of the issues addressed by the book collection to which this volume belongs: to illuminate and explore the various aspects in relation to which art and its history have been and are interpreted. As L. Venturi says, "art history needs to be aware of the nature of art [...] in order to distinguish whether a painting or a statue is a work of art, an artistic creation, or whether it is merely a rational, economic, moral or religious fact."<sup>1</sup>

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1. L. Venturi, *Storia della critica d'arte*, Florence, 1918, p. 28 [Spanish translation by Rossend Arqués in: L. Venturi, *Historia de la crítica de arte*, Barcelona, Gustavo Gili, 1979, p. 32].

### *Current events in art*

Artistic phenomena and related issues are currently attracting the interest of a wider audience than ever before. Exhibitions have never received as many visitors as they do today, and discussions (especially about contemporary art) have never attracted so many people, drawing them out of their indifference to other aspects of life. No other religious, social or political issue (at least in our Western world) fascinates people so much, and for this reason it has been said that art occupies the place of religion for many. How does it achieve this?

In what essential feature of art is this possibility included? Art in the Modern Age (that is, since Italian Humanism) has always been a possible interpretation of objects, actions, or attitudes. Today's human beings grant a special field of action and special importance to artists who discover unknown aspects of reality and extract them from the contingent and meaningless plurality of phenomena, interpreting them. The general projects of the world, which the higher powers of life also impose on the artist, the dogmas that have been in force until now, have lost their binding character, but not as a consequence of the activity of a sceptical or 'existentialist' philosophy, which is rather a reflection and expression of the spiritual situation. Human beings today feel, more than ever, abandoned to a plurality of *possible* interpretations, actions and attitudes, all of which seem to offer them reasonable opportunities. The artistic vision, artistic expression, with its way of manifesting the meaning of things, meets this spiritual situation and corresponds to a current need.

### *Art in its existential meaning, as a configuration of vital reality*

As all human activity consists of shaping (in the broadest sense: ourselves and the world), art undoubtedly plays an immediate role in the process of consciously shaping reality. The experience of artistic creation provides fundamental models, forms of representation

with which we capture impressions of the outside world in which we perceive it as articulated and meaningful. For this reason alone, art cannot be understood simply as a mere perception of reality, for art contributes essentially to the development of our way of perceiving and understanding. From this point of view, art is more than an idealised representation of a reality that stands before it; we ourselves belong to that reality, which continues to take shape in us and through us. Human consciousness does not exist before experiences, nor does it survive them, but rather arises and grows with our actions and attitudes, thus shaping the reality in which it is originally included and which it simultaneously transcends.

At what level, what special form of consciousness, of the configuration of reality, does art correspond? Our existence unfolds above all under the immediate pressure of reality, which must be interpreted and mastered. This interpretation and mastery are our realisation of existence.

As G. C. Argan says, interpreting the ideas of the architect Gropius and the Bauhaus, art...

[...] arises from life itself, from the usual relationship between people and the things they live among and use. From the humblest piece of furniture, it necessarily extends, in a continuous process, to the structural articulation of the building, and from there to the ensemble of other buildings and their distribution, according to the vital and functional requirements of the community, thus coming to define the form of the city and encompass all aspects of the organised world of culture.<sup>2</sup>

Architecture, as construction, represents the very expression of the constructiveness of consciousness; it has the task of clarifying the confusing space of today's world [...]. Architecture, the work of men for men, intervenes in all moments and acts of existence, mediates and conditions man's vital relationships with reality, [...] it is almost a second body that men procure for that higher and more authentic life, not only natural but organised and historical, which is social life.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Giulio Carlo Argan, *Walter Gropius e la Bauhaus*, Turin, 1951, p. 53 [Spanish translation by Abdulio Giudici in: G. C. Argan, *Walter Gropius y la Bauhaus*, Barcelona, Gustavo Gili, 1983, p. 43].

3. *Ibid.*, p. 50 [pp. 39–40].

Thus, we can no longer understand art as the expression of the genius of a few or as a luxury, but rather we must recognise it as a decisive aspect of human existence and understand it in this function. Undoubtedly, the problem of artistic configuration and its interpretation is coming to the forefront of general consciousness and seems to be permeating all areas of human experience, from industry to urban planning.

### *Is art a truism?*

Has art (in the current aesthetic sense of the word) always existed? It is often said that it has. That is why the science of art speaks of "Prehistoric *art*" and art museums preserve copies of ancient cave paintings depicting animals, people, and superhuman beings. But shouldn't we ask ourselves whether we are understanding as works of art things that were not intended as such by their creators, nor executed as such?

This question is not idle, for without an answer to it, these creative testimonies could not be presented, classified, and appreciated from an artistic point of view. There are worlds and cultures in which not only have works of art (in the modern sense of the concept) never existed, but also could not exist: mythical worlds that have existed not only in the most remote times, but also many times throughout history, for example in the Christian Middle Ages. To this we must add that it is precisely the works of these mythical eras that arouse such intense interest today, are frequently exhibited and are understood without further ado as 'works of art'. This appreciation would have been impossible only a hundred years ago; no one would have imagined that an art lover could value, for example, the miniatures in medieval books (which were 'discovered' in this sense in the 20th century) more than the art of Raphael. These facts must be derived from shifts in categories that force us to revise our usual ideas about art.

Malraux has indicated that it would be a mistake to study, for example, the *Christ* of Monreale (a Byzantine mosaic) with the same categories with which we understand modern creations as works of art. The latter, says Malraux, we always see

with the awareness that we are dealing with fiction, 'the illusion of an idealised world'. In contrast, the *Christ* of Monreale is a religious reality: 'All fiction begins by saying "let's suppose that..."'. The *Christ* of Monreale was not a supposition, but an affirmation. The *David* of Chartres was not an assumption. Nor was Giotto's *Reunion at the Golden Gate*. A *Madonna* by Lippi or Botticelli began to be one; Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* and *Last Supper* were sublime tales."<sup>(4)</sup>

The sacred nature of these works also allows us to understand that, at that time, what mattered was not whether the works were 'beautiful', nor whether they were placed in inaccessible, poorly lit locations, to the point of being invisible. Does this mean that Giotto's paintings or the *Christ* of Monreale are not works of art? And if they are, do we do them justice with our usual artistic categories?

D. H. Kahnweiler writes the following in an article on the limits of art history:

The Egyptian sculptor wanted to create an image of Isis; the medieval painter, an image of Jesus Christ. They understood 'art' simply as craftsmanship, the execution of a task. Certainly, they created what we call 'works of art', 'aesthetic goods', for they were artists, talented men who imbued their works with beauty. But they did so unconsciously. [...] On the other hand, contemporary viewers could not coldly contemplate sacred images as "aesthetic objects"; they approached them with respect and awe, with fervent prayers. In fact, the word "art" appears in medieval Western writings only in the sense of "craft".<sup>5</sup>

### *Theory of art and aesthetics*

That said, we must ask ourselves whether the object of our research (the theory of beauty in Antiquity) is a univocal subject. We tend to identify the concept of art with the concept of beauty, as classical histories do

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4. A. Malraux, *Psychologie der Kunst. I: Das Imaginäre Museum*, German translation by Jan Lauts, Hamburg, 1957, p. 59 [A. Malraux, *Le Musée Imaginaire*, Paris, Gallimard, 2012, p. 20].

5. D. H. Kahnweiler, 'Die Grenzen der Kunstgeschichte', in: *Monatshefte für Kunstwissenschaft*, 13, no. 1, April 1920.

of aesthetics (for example, those of J. Walter and Eduard Müller),<sup>6</sup> and to assume that 'aesthetics' (in the modern sense of the word) must begin with considerations of beauty in antiquity.

We must examine whether this identification of beauty with works of art is justified, or whether it is simply an adoption of traditional patterns. Answering this question is important, because otherwise we risk understanding theories and reflections on beauty as contributions to a theory of art and aesthetics even though they have nothing to do with art.

This raises the question: when and why did art begin to present itself as something autonomous from beauty? What was originally the domain of beauty in antiquity? Clarifying these questions is very relevant today, since aesthetics for us is the world that no longer has the power to engage human beings; it is the realm of the non-binding, which offers us refuge from the rigour and seriousness of reality, as Kierkegaard interpreted aestheticism in *Either/Or*.

#### *Existential interpretation of art and reaction against aestheticism*

In our time, some currents in contemporary art have undergone a radical shift. Artistic configuration has become a form of human creative capacity, of human *poiesis*; it is the capacity to transform reality, the faculty of transcending it in its immediacy and not only through 'interpretation'. The increasingly profound understanding of this truth has led to a radical critique of aestheticism by artists themselves.

Poetry is rejected as "literature," its demise is proclaimed, artistic activity is attributed a general existential meaning, its goal should no longer be aesthetic "beauty," art and beauty no longer coincide as aesthetic-literary categories. Human transcendence wants to manifest itself in works that participate directly in the realisation of life, in its binding power. But

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6. J. Walter, *Die Geschichte der Aesthetik im Altertum*, Leipzig, 1883; Eduard Müller, *Geschichte der Theorie der Kunst bei den Alten*, 2 vols., Breslau, 1834–1837.

In our opinion, these currents in *contemporary* art are thus distinct from *modern* currents, from the era that began with Italian Humanism. With this distinction ("modern" and "contemporary") we have not made any value judgement whatsoever.

## 2. The end of poetry as "literature"

*Baudelaire: the poet as witness to transcendence*

The study of the development of the conception of art in poetry from Baudelaire to Rimbaud and Lautréamont leads to important conclusions. To demonstrate this, I basically follow the argument of an unpublished manuscript by Godofredo Iommi.<sup>7</sup> A fundamental motif in Baudelaire's artistic thinking is that poetry is not a frivolous game in a fictional world, but springs from the depths of human existence. Of course, other poets before him had already understood the poetic word as a shaping factor of life, but Baudelaire attempts (with his works and his theory of poetry, but also with his human attitude, with the whole praxis of his existence) to wrest the poetic from the literary sphere. Baudelaire programmatically declares that poetry has its roots in the body, in physical capacities, in life. "*Poetry touches on music through a prosody whose roots plunge deeper into the human soul than any classical theory indicates.*"<sup>8</sup> If poetry transforms reality and transcends the given, and this is part of the essence of being human, then the purely literary is not an adequate form of expression; human transcendence can and must be realised in many other ways. This idea corresponds to Baudelaire's theory of the dandy. "*Le dandysme est le dernier éclat d'héroïsme dans les décadences*" (Dandyism is the last burst of heroism in *decadence*),  
because:

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7. Godofredo Iommi (1917–2001), Chilean poet and professor of Italian origin. Many of his texts can be found in the library at [www.ead.pucv.cl/amereida/](http://www.ead.pucv.cl/amereida/). [Translator's note]

8. Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, 1954, p. 1383 ["poetry borders on music thanks to a prosody whose roots are so deeply embedded in the human soul that no classical theory can explain it," draft preface to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Spanish translation by Ernesto Kavi in: C. Baudelaire, *Drawings 1843-1859. Posthumous Fragments 1854-1866*, Barcelona, Sexto Piso, 2012, p. 325].

"In the turmoil of these times, a few men who have fallen from grace, disillusioned and idle, but all rich in innate strength, may conceive the project of founding a new kind of aristocracy, one that will be all the more difficult to break because it will be based on the most precious and indestructible faculties, and on the heavenly gifts that work and money cannot confer."<sup>9</sup> "We see that, in some ways, dandyism borders on spiritualism and stoicism."<sup>10</sup> Baudelaire knows that poetry (and art in general) is not the culmination of humanity; forced to choose, he decides to intervene in reality, and thus formulates this very significant phrase: "No human respect, no false modesty, no coalition, no universal suffrage, will prevent me from speaking the incomparable patois of this century, nor from confusing ink with virtue."<sup>11</sup>

Baudelaire's interpretation of dandyism corresponds to a completely new style: the invention of gestures, actions, and words that proclaim again and again the presence of the poet among human beings. This means the following: the poet becomes a living witness to transcendence, proving his ability to overcome and transform everything. The dandy denies and dissolves everything that is already institutionalised and constituted; and this dissolution is revealed through the face of absurdity. The risk that the poet takes is not only exposed in his work, but is realised, suffered and lived directly and permanently throughout his entire existence. It is about the experience and execution of a form of existence that contrasts with everyday reality, with convention, through words and deeds. Dandyism demands that the poet (the human being capable of *poiesis*) not flee to the artificial garden of 'literature' (leaving reality intact).

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9. *Ibid.*, p. 908 ["Dandyism is the last spark of heroism in times of decline," because: "In the disorder of those times, some men who are declassed, jaded, idle, but all rich in native strength, may conceive the project of founding a new kind of aristocracy, all the more difficult to break up as it will be based on the most precious, most indestructible faculties, and in the heavenly gifts that work and money cannot confer." Spanish translation by Alcira Saavedra in: C. Baudelaire, *El pintor de la vida moderna*, Murcia, Colegio Oficial de Aparejadores y Arquitectos Técnicos, 1995, p. 116].

10. *Ibid.*, p. 907 ["We see how, in certain respects, dandyism borders on spiritualism and stoicism," *The Painter of Modern Life*, p. 115].

11. *Ibid.*, p. 1381 ["But no human respect, no false modesty, no coalition, no universal suffrage will force me to speak the unrepresentable dialect of this century, nor to confuse ink with virtue," *Drawings*, p. 319].

profound human being, his self-realisation), but rather transcends artistic boundaries by consciously renouncing them and committing himself as a complete human being.

*Rimbaud: the transfer of poetic action from literary work to existence*

For Rimbaud, the fundamental work of the poet is poetic existence, so that the poem is only one element of his performance: the poet must devote himself to the unfolding of all reality, until it (and therefore he too) has reached its consummation. The poet thus becomes a worker; Rimbaud lived this experience to the full. "Poetic action, insofar as it is experienced and realised in one's own existence, leads to forms other than those of the language of a poem" (Iommi). "*Point de cantiques: tenir le pas gagné,*" Rimbaud tells himself as a poet.<sup>12</sup> Work becomes a deeper duty, and as a result Rimbaud will abandon literature forever. "*Moi! moi qui me suis dit mage ou ange, dispensé de tout morale, je suis rendu au sol, avec un devoir à chercher, et réali-té rugueuse à étreindre! [...] Eh bien! Je dois enterrer mon imagination et mes souvenirs! Une belle gloire d'artiste et de conteur empor-tée!*"<sup>13</sup> Rimbaud expresses his deepest desire in the final words of *Une saison en enfer*: "*et il me sera loisible de posséder la vérité dans une âme et un corps*".<sup>14</sup> In exchange, Rimbaud stopped writing; *Une saison en enfer* is the poem that marks his final abandonment of poetry as literature.

This last poem before the definitive transfer of poetic action to existence will be very important for later poetry because it too wants to be anti-literature, anti-art. In the words of Iommi:

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12. Arthur Rimbaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, 1952, p. 244 ["No songs: keep what has been gained"; Spanish translation by Julia Escobar in: A. Rimbaud, *Una temporada en el infierno. Iluminaciones*, Madrid, Alianza, 2009, p. 87].

13. *Ibid.*, p. 243 ["I! I who believed myself to be a magician or an angel, exempt from any morality, have been brought back down to earth to seek a duty and embrace harsh reality! ... Well, I must bury my imagination and my memories! A beautiful glory as an artist and storyteller snatched away," p. 87].

14. *Ibid.*, p. 244 ["and it will be possible for me to possess the truth in one soul and one body," p. 87].

Rimbaud's thesis, experience and testimony open up a decisive breach in the traditional concept of poetry. The idea that connects poetry essentially with the literary poem enters into crisis. [...] Poetry can act on reality through forms and means that no longer have a literary character. [...] Rimbaud was a man of letters who ceased to be one without ceasing to be a poet. [...] One of the fundamental features of contemporary poetry is the constant proclamation of the abandonment and even the meaninglessness of literature understood as the only expression of poetry as a 'poetic' activity.

*Lautréamont: the self-denial of poetry*

"Poetry must have practical truth as its goal," says Lautréamont.<sup>15</sup> Poetry is the activation of human creative nature, which constantly shapes its own world. It must avoid subjective experiences and the tears of personal sentimentality in order to reach the sphere of the objective and realise the relationships between people and things. In other words, poetry must be at the service of truth. This goal requires the joint effort of many, who will thus achieve the objective and crystallise the content of truth. *"Personal poetry has had its day of relative juggling and contingent contortions. Let us take up again the indestructible thread of impersonal poetry."*<sup>16</sup> *"Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It closely serves an author's sentence, uses their expressions, erases a false idea, and replaces it with the right idea."*<sup>17</sup> *"Poetry must be made by all. Not by one."*<sup>18</sup>

The new goal determines the form of poetry: *'Poetry must have practical truth as its goal. It sets out the relationships that exist between the first principles and the secondary truths of*

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15. Lautréamont, *Oeuvres complètes*, Paris, 1958, p. 377 ['Poetry must have practical truth as its goal', Spanish translation by Luis Justo in: Lautréamont, *Poesías y cartas*, Buenos Aires, Marymar, 1977].

16. *Ibid.*, p. 372 ["Personal poetry has served its time of relative juggling and contingent contortions. Let us return to the indestructible thread of impersonal poetry," p. 35].

17. *Ibid.*, p. 381 ["Plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it. It adheres to an author's phrase, uses their expressions, erases a false idea, and replaces it with the right idea," p. 48].

18. *Ibid.*, p. 386 ["Poetry must be made by everyone. Not by one person," p. 55].

vie".<sup>19</sup> Therefore, verse will no longer be the form of new poetry:  
"Must I write in verse to set myself apart from other men? Let charity be  
the judge."<sup>20</sup>

In both Rimbaud and Lautréamont, poetry sings of itself as the human capacity to transcend, but at the same time declares itself (as pure 'song') insufficient to realise this essential element of human nature. The denial of itself as a work gives poetry a meaning that transcends the limits of a poem. Poetic activity captivates and engages the whole human being. *Les Chants de Maldoror*, which does not want to be 'just' literature, but wants to realise transcendence (understood as the essence of human nature), can no longer be an 'artistic work' in the traditional sense. Through poetry, life must change (as Rimbaud wanted) in the direction of goodness and truth. Lautréamont uses much of his prologue to condemn all poetry that limits itself to singing of passions. He rejects poetry without moral value, which here means: without meaning for the conquest of truth.

#### *Surrealism as anti-literature and anti-art*

This raises a peculiar problem: this art no longer wants to be 'literature', an aesthetic work, but then it seems to have no other option but to degrade itself to being an element of praxis, of action, of politics. Only from this perspective can certain programmatic theses of Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism, of *poésie engagée*, as well as the commitment to a political movement such as Communism, be understood.

Nadeau says:

Surrealism was considered by its founders not as a new artistic school, but as a means of understanding new areas that had not yet been systematically explored: the subconscious, the marvellous, dreams...

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19. *Ibid.*, p. 377 ["Poetry must have practical truth as its goal. It articulates the relationships that exist between the first principles and the secondary truths of life," pp. 42-43].

20. *Ibid.*, p. 393 ["Should I write in verse and thus set myself apart from other men? Let charity decide!" p. 65].

year, madness, states of hallucination. If we add to this the fantastic and the astonishing that exists in the world, we have, in a word, the reverse of logical conception.<sup>21</sup>

Poetry is no longer a distraction for adolescents in the throes of growing up, but a practice that presents the personality in its authentic integrity and influences others through forces that remain a mystery. The poet has become the "inspirer," the one who sparks new *actions*, unknown thoughts, and life transformations. He no longer works in his ivory tower. He naturally joins in daily life, blending into it and constantly seeking new excitement.<sup>22</sup>

Surrealism could be criticised for its contradictory tendencies: on the one hand, it wants to be anti-literature, anti-art, abandoning the field of 'art' in the traditional sense of the word; on the other hand, it seems to be developing a new form of poetry, a new form of plastic art. On its way to non-art, surrealism seems to arrive back at art. Or should we say that its products are not works of art? And if so, what are they?

Instead of "poetic" forms, we see the emergence of *écriture auto-matique*, the dictation of the unconscious without "artistic" control, without "beauty". But we must avoid the misunderstandings that art historians and even defenders of surrealism often fall into by ignoring the intentions of this movement. Thus, for example, it is not correct to present Marcel Duchamp's famous "bottle dryer"<sup>23</sup> as proof that this "art" is absurd, as if this object had been created with the intention of being a work of art.

What is Duchamp trying to achieve with this object? Nadeau responds:

What is a surrealist object? In general, it could be said that it is any *dislocated* object,<sup>24</sup> that is, one that has been removed from its usual sphere, em-

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21. Maurice Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme*, Paris, 1945, p. 72 [Spanish translation by Raúl Navarro in: M. Nadeau, *Historia del surrealismo*, Valencia, Ahimsa, 2001, pp. 51-52].

22. *Ibid.*, p. 88 [Spanish translation cited, p. 60].

23. It is an object made up of rings with hooks on which bottles are placed to dry, as is done in restaurants. Duchamp mounted it as a *ready-made* on a pedestal and placed it in an art exhibition.

24. Nadeau uses the famous surrealist French term *dépaysé*, which means: separated from its homeland, moved to another country, and here: an object separated from its rational use.

used for purposes other than those for which it is intended or whose function is unknown. Therefore, it is any object that appears to have been made on a whim, with no other purpose than the satisfaction of the person who made it, and thus, any object made according to the dictates of the subconscious, of dreams. And ultimately, don't Marcel Duchamp's *ready-mades* meet these conditions? [...] Let us take a bottle rack, an object as innocuous as can be, and give it artistic value on our own terms by isolating it from its everyday function [for example, by placing it on a pedestal as if it were a sculpture]. Let us appeal to everyone's subconscious to consider it unique and forget its use, and we will have a strange object, with all its points arranged in decreasing circles and pointing upwards, an object that catalyses a multitude of subconscious desires.<sup>25</sup>

What Duchamp proclaims with his dislocated object, which does not want to be a 'work of art', can also be understood as the unlimited capacity to transcend, which is accredited before the unheard of and unexpected, before any ordinary and banal object that, by the simple fact of being chosen, through an act of will by the artist, has been elevated to that honourable place previously occupied by the work of art, which is now rejected with disgust. This object establishes new and unexpected relationships, awakens associations, evokes a world of metaphors as a sphere of "art". At the same time, any concept of beauty that is "intellectual," "sensitive," or aestheticising; human transcendence can become visible in every action and attitude, in every event and in every intervention in reality.

And how much passion there is in each of these anti-artistic, anti-aesthetic manifestations, in each proclamation of the end of poetry as literature!

Vaché writes in his *Lettres de guerre* (1919): 'We want neither art nor artists (down with Apollinaire!). We do not know Mallarmé, without any hatred, but he is dead. We no longer recognise Apollinaire, as we suspect him of *making* art that is too wise and of patching up romanticism with telephone wires.'<sup>26</sup> André Breton refers in his *Caractères d'évolution moderne* (1922) to Rimbaud's renunciation of art. "There are currently some individuals wandering the world for whom art, for example, has ceased to be an end"; Rimbaud was one of them: "His work deserves to remain a watchman on our path" because it has expressed "a

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25. *Ibid.*, p. 212 [Spanish translation cited, pp. 134–135].

26. Quoted in Nadeau, *History of Surrealism*, p. 33. [Translator's note]

a concern that thousands of generations have undoubtedly not avoided, and gave him that voice that still resonates in our ears."<sup>(27)</sup>

Nadeau quotes the Surrealists' *Declaration* of 27 January 1925, which among other things states:

1. We have nothing to do with literature. But we are, if necessary, quite capable of using it like everyone else. 2. Surrealism is not a new or easier means of expression, nor is it a metaphysics of poetry. It is a means of total liberation of the spirit and everything that may resemble it. 3. We are completely determined to make the revolution.<sup>28</sup>

In this regard, Aragon writes in *Fragments d'une conférence prononcée à Madrid à la Residencia de Estudiantes* (18 April 1925, published in *Révolution surréaliste*, 4):

We will destroy everything. First, we will ruin this civilisation that is so dear to you and where you are moulded like fossils in shale. Western world, you are doomed to die. We are the defeatists of Europe... May the East, the terror of you all, finally respond to our voice. We will awaken everywhere the seeds of confusion and unrest [...]. Let the Jews come out of their ghettos. [...] Move, India of a thousand arms, legendary great Brahma. You, Egypt. [...] See how dry this land is and how conducive to all fires. One would say it is made of straw.<sup>29</sup>

In 1927, five surrealist poets (Aragon, Breton, Eluard, Péret and Unik) announced that Antonin Artaud and Philippe Soupault had been expelled from the movement: it was no longer enough to rail against literature and art, it was necessary to fight seriously for the revolution and bring it about. Problems arose in the relationship between surrealism and communism.

#### *Current problems as a starting point for questioning the texts of Antiquity*

The developments currently taking place in the arts, which we have presented here through a number of specific examples

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27. *Ibid.*, pp. 44 and 45. [*Translator's note*]

28. Quoted in Nadeau, *Histoire du Surréalisme*, p. 104 [Spanish translation, p. 70].

29. *Ibid.*, p. 115 [Spanish translation, p. 77].

These developments (the questioning of the aesthetic concept of art, the end of poetry as literature, the impulse towards reality rather than a fictional artistic world) are a much broader phenomenon than we have been able to show here; they are not only seen in the developments that led to surrealism, but also in many other currents of the recent past and present. This situation leads us to wonder whether there is a tradition in Western cultural history in which current trends can find an ancestor. It may seem like an astonishing *contaminatio* that the problems of modern art are chosen as a starting point for questioning the texts of Antiquity; philologists will find the reference to Modernity absurd and will doubt that this will advance the slightest bit towards understanding those texts; and to others, the recourse to Antiquity to interpret the problems of modern art will seem irrelevant.

However, we are convinced that rigorous study

A purely philological-historical study of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Quintilian, and even Cicero is sterile for art if it does not take into account the problems that concern us today. To remain alive, a science must be capable of addressing the questions raised by the course of history. Otherwise, it will be a sterile curiosity and will only thrive in a closed field, on the margins of life. On the other hand, the study of Western tradition could yield clarifying insights for dealing with the questions raised by contemporary art.

*Confusion of historical categories. The need for tradition*

To give an example of the confusion of concepts that reigns today in this regard, let us quote a phrase from Georges Mathieu:<sup>30</sup> 'Without leaving the West: since the decline of our civilisation began, that is, since the 13th century, we have moved from the ideal to the real, from the real to the abstract, from the abstract to the purely possible'.

How are the concepts of "real", "abstract" and "possible"? This question is not secondary, since these concepts aim to mark the stages of the development of art up to

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30. G. Mathieu, "D'Aristote à l'abstraction lyrique," in: *L'œil. Revue d'art*, no. 52, Paris, 1959, pp. 28-35.

our days. From Giotto, through the Italian "primitives" to Raphael and Titian, then from Caravaggio to the realists, one could trace (according to Mathieu) a line indicating an increasingly strong departure from medieval idealism and the emergence of a realistic reproduction of nature. The next phase would be the liberation from 'photographic' realism through Impressionism, the liberation of colour from representation, the liberation of form from illusionism through Cubism and, finally, the renunciation of representation, which led to geometric abstraction.

The final liberation is "with regard to the canon of beauty, the laws of harmony and composition, the golden ratio, etc. This is the beginning of the final phase. We could call it *the transition from the abstract to the possible*."

Mathieu describes this development as anti-Aristotelian, saying: "This obvious point needs to be made at a time when the fundamental errors of Aristotle and Plato continue to exert a certain influence." Similar statements can be found in other fields, such as drama, for example when Ionesco attempts to write a play that challenges the "Aristotelian" conception of drama. But in its theoretical foundation, this "revolution" that claims to be anti-Aristotelian is only a

"Pseudo" revolution, because it fights against pseudo-concepts that have arisen through a chain of misunderstandings in the historical confrontation with the concept of art and beauty in Antiquity. For tradition to truly shape history, it is not enough to combat misunderstandings; we must also re-understand the original sources and make them speak. This work on the aesthetics of Antiquity, as well as Rosario Assunto's work on the aesthetics of the Middle Ages, aims to contribute to this and at the same time shed theoretical and pedagogical light on the art history collection in which they are published.

### **3. Modern art and contemporary art**

#### *Modern art as a discovery of the world*

We have established a distinction between "contemporary art" (which is considered "anti-art", combats aestheticism and proclaims the end of poetry as "literature") and "modern art" (which

began in Italy around 1400 and has essentially determined the aesthetic concepts that are still valid today). What characterises the latter, in contrast to current trends that are programmatically directed against aestheticism and that want to use the poetic capacity of human beings not only to discover any human 'possibilities', but to transform the entire 'reality' of human beings?

The Modern Age marked the beginning of the discovery of the world and of human beings through art, according to Jacob Burckhardt's well-known thesis on the Italian Renaissance. To characterise this discovery as clearly as possible as a defining feature of our concept of the Modern Age in art, we will quote an article by Kurt Bauch on the beginnings of modern art

If today we accept a landscape painting as a fully valid work of art, this criterion dates back to the golden age of Dutch painting in the 17th century:

A landscape like this [Bauch refers to one by Hercules Seghers, ca. 1630] seems familiar to us, a matter of course. But at that time it was something *unusual*. Anyone who, like Rubens, sought bodily compositions and great meaning in the landscape would find the construction lacking here. Even the first landscape specialists, who were not considered great painters, had composed their landscapes in terms of plasticity and colour. This painting does not even seem to be a landscape of this type. [...] Here there is nothing constructed from meanings, from coloured bodies, here there is nothing divine, superhuman, eternal, but rather the landscape is there for its own sake. It does not refer to other supernatural beings, but rather the painter shows us its image as a being, as an object, as a subject. [...] The world is limited to the "nature," to the merely present. [...] The world is pre-sent as a fragment, as the visible, as the seen.<sup>32</sup>

Bauch explains that the Dutch word *beeld* originally meant 'image', 'figure', but that since then its meaning has shifted towards 'copy', the reproduction of something that exists: 'Here, for the first time, a pure landscape is shown...'

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31. Kurt Bauch, "Die Anfänge der neuzeitlichen Kunst" [The Beginnings of Modern Art], in: *Die Entfaltung der Wissenschaft. Vorträge gehalten auf der Tagung der Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften in Hamburg 1957* [The Development of Science. Lectures given at the conference of the Joachim Jungius Society of Sciences in Hamburg in 1957], Hamburg, 1958, pp. 118-139.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

mind as an aspect, as a view."<sup>33</sup> For a long time, landscape was known as a complement to paintings with other themes, but now landscape is being discovered as such, and a fragment of nature now occupies the centre of a painting.

At the same time, the Dutch "saw" not only the landscape, but also what was "very close", what was really most immediate; they turned their gaze to what surrounds human beings: they discovered still life.

Even the small things around us have meaning and form. This seems obvious to us, but it was the Dutch who became artistically aware of this. In the early Dutch paintings (including Rubens), there are wonderful fruits and magnificent flowers, but only as secondary elements in large paintings depicting people. It would never have occurred to them to recognise such things as subjects worthy of a painting in their own right. [...] What appears here has retained its freshness over the centuries. The appearance of these things is observed with the utmost accuracy. We are drawn almost to their surface, but without meticulous myopia. The image is subtle, confident and simple. The drawing is so good that no one thinks to question it. [...] Everything is shown in a soft, fresh, clear, greenish-cold light. This subtle and refined aroma corresponds to the brilliance of crystal, pewter and silver, as well as the taste of wine, herring and lemon.<sup>34</sup>

Landscape and still life painting extracts something specific from a larger context, captures it in itself, and thus creates a new way of seeing. Modern art "discovers" new objects, new themes, new views over and over again, which will seem obvious to later artists and viewers.

### *The change in the place and task of art*

Seventeenth-century Dutch painting (to continue with this example) was so revolutionary that, as Bauch says, it not only created itself, but also provided a new answer to the question of what art is, where its place is, and what it should do.

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33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

By discovering new themes, the task of art in space is also seen in a new way.

Medieval painting presented the afterlife in an earthly manner; it was a sacred object, forming part of the space of a church, where it had to act or even dominate. Byzantine mosaics and Gothic stained glass windows transformed walls into a self-representation of the supernatural. The modern painting, on its easel, is not an object linked to a space, but transportable; we can hang it on any wall.

The colour and body of the painting are consumed in their own materiality, rather than acting outwards, in space. A black frame separates it from the wall and directs the gaze towards the image. The painting becomes a window, taking us out of this space, out of this world. For the painting has its own space, its own world. It exists for itself; we can clearly take it down or cover it with a cloth. A church without an altarpiece or hidden frescoes would be an incomplete, useless space. On the contrary, this space would remain what it was. It is neither articulated nor formed. The wall is white as chalk, clean and sober, it is a purely profane world. For here the space is an individual's room, the private sphere of bourgeois everyday life. This space now contains art for the first time; it is the proper place for this new art.<sup>35</sup>

What cultural factors of the Modern Age have created this new place for art? What does the succession of discoveries mean, the development of art as the art of seeing new connections that do not claim to be reality, but rather seek to extract from our 'real' world fragmentary possibilities, 'worthy of being depicted in a painting'?

Modern art becomes a function in the relationship between human beings and their existence in the world; it provides projects which, in line with the development of the human attitude towards their environment and themselves, attempt to extract changing meanings from reality. This confrontation of human beings with reality presupposes absolute freedom, the condition of the free project of *possibilities* of being that express the development of the relationship of human beings with reality and give it a visible presence.

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35. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

*The problem of the meaning of contemporary art*

At the outset, we mentioned several reasons why the function of art has not always been to reveal "possibilities of reality," distilling new themes and visions from the connections in which we live and which we call "reality." Freedom has not always been considered the fundamental premise of art, and its object has not always been the inexhaustible possibilities of human historicity. Our concept of a successful work of art, which we call 'beautiful', has not always been the same.

Could the pretensions of current works to no longer be 'just' art be due to a weariness with unlimited possibilities, to a decline in interest in the various aspects of the human relationship with reality whose premise is aestheticism and which do not imply a decision, a real commitment? Then, contemporary art would unexpectedly expose the situation of modern human beings: if modern art (not contemporary art) has shown *possible* new meanings of reality, that is, if it has extracted new aspects from reality, making them visible, contemporary art could have arisen from the experience that all possible ways of seeing things, landscapes, figures, colours, attitudes and actions have been exhausted, as well as from the unbearable lack of commitment, which is the premise of this aesthetic behaviour and which now eliminates interest in non-binding possibilities. Then, the only artistic goal of human beings today would be either to expose this situation of disinterest or, renouncing all representation, to intervene in reality with facts or objects created by art. If this were the case, the works of our time would not be an expression of malicious scepticism at all, but rather a reaction to the exhaustion of the 'free' possibilities that the development of modern art has unfolded, an attempt to reconnect with a binding reality. Human beings today would claim to be affected in their deepest being, in their existential reality, by beauty, by art, by configuration. We must now ask ourselves whether this conception of art and beauty can appeal to meanings that corresponded to this sphere at the beginning of Western cultural history.

# I. BEAUTY AS THE SPLENDOUR AND POWER OF PRIMORDIAL REALITY. THE ONTOLOGICAL MEANING OF BEAUTY

## 1. The oldest manifestations of beauty and art

*Do aesthetic categories do justice to the 'beautiful' works of Antiquity?*

It is difficult to ascertain what theoretical notion corresponded to the concepts of 'art' and 'beauty' in the early days of Western thought, before Plato. And it is even more difficult if we approach these concepts with the question of whether the Greek impulse towards beauty concealed a desire to reach a certain level of reality from which human beings could be grasped in their entirety, or whether it was rather a question of making visible 'possible' human worlds and interpretations of reality that contained nothing binding.

Where are the theories of art and beauty from Antiquity? As we have already mentioned, today we tend to identify the concept of beauty with the concept of art and make the history of both emerge from a common starting point. Is this approach justified? Does the application of aesthetic categories to the works of Antiquity do justice to their essence? Can we grasp their fundamental content in this way? 'Ancient cultures perceive the image not as a mere representation, but as reality, with a presence so dense that our aesthetic contemplation cannot even imagine it. The sea creatures and plants on Cretan amphorae are divine life, belonging to the great goddess Nature, who was born of the sea.'<sup>(1)</sup>

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I. K. Schefold, *Greek Art as a Religious Phenomenon*, Hamburg, 1959, pp. 13–14.

From a modern perspective, art is not content with merely depicting experiences that many have had, but seeks to show us something "new". Do religious representations, for example statues of ancient gods or those in a cathedral, seek to offer something "seen in a new way"? Can the essence of a Greek temple be captured using aesthetic categories (as has long been attempted)?

### *The pre-Platonic conception of beauty and art*

The rigorous and coherent study of the concepts of beauty and art, as well as their differentiation, must begin with Plato. But Plato bases his work on the writings of Hesiod, Homer, Simonides, Pindar, and the tragedians; for Plato, the great popular poets are guides and fathers of wisdom. In the works of these authors, words such as 'beautiful', 'art' and 'imitation' appear, but not as conscious reflections, rather as immediate designations, such as those used in descriptions and treatises. We cannot interpret in detail the concepts implied here, as that would be the task of a philologist; a general terminological overview of this kind would not be methodologically appropriate for our purpose. We can only attempt, with the help of a few examples, to place the milestones of the oscillating pre-Platonic development of concepts, whose meanings Plato would later take up with determination to lead them to a univocal content.

In the case of pre-Platonic texts, care must be taken to ensure that it is important to distinguish the concept of beauty from the concept of goodness ( $\alpha\theta\acute{o}\nu$ ) and expressions such as 'good' (*sũ*), as they are often confused. The same thing happens today in German when things and properties are called 'beautiful' using the prefix *wohl* ('good') and terms such as *Wohlgestalt* or *wohlgebildet* are used. On the other hand, in everyday language it is not unusual to respond to a sentence by saying *schön* ('beautiful') with the meaning of *gut* ('good').

### *The beautiful and the good. Hesiod*

In Hesiod, the term 'good' does not originally have a moral meaning. It is sometimes linked to the concept of usefulness,

For virtue and talent are found above all in prudence, which chooses the appropriate means for something to reach its goal; that is why there are good and bad days for planting something (*Works*, 781, 783, 317). On other occasions, the term 'good' is understood as an end and goal, as consummation (*Theogony*, 906; *Works*, 36, 320, 702). It is then that the good takes on a moral meaning in relation to a human quality, such as justice (*Works*, 24, 236, 356).

The concept of beauty refers above all to the sense directed outward: sight (beauty of form, colouring, ornamentation); it designates visible forms. Aphrodite was born of a 'beautiful' mother, Hephaestus tried with his skill to create a beautiful woman, Pandora (*Theogony*, 17, 120, 194, 201; *Works*, 63). It would be necessary to examine to what extent goodness is connected with beauty, for if goodness consists in correctness (e.g., in the correct selection of days for planting), then intelligent reflection also gives visibility to the harmony that brings goodness into the realm of beauty. Furthermore, if each thing is determined by its end, its properties are obvious and perceived as beautiful.

If goodness lies in the realm of ends, of the planned, of the orderly, of what human beings carry out and do "Visible," the meaning of beauty seems to refer above all to the pleasant nature of what is seen. But we must ask whether beauty can go beyond the realm of outward appearance and enter the realm of the inner, the spiritual. For how are we to understand Hesiod's statement that his *Theogony* is beautiful because it is *a gift from the Muses* (*Theogony*, 22)? In what sense is the divine beautiful?

It is difficult to give a precise answer based on meanings that have not yet been separated and scattered elements. Plato took up these terms and defined them systematically; for him, the realm of beauty is the visible, it includes the concept of harmony and from there extends to the spiritual realm, which obviously has to be harmonious and is governed by limits and laws. But in linking the concepts of beauty and goodness, Plato is continuing a long tradition. Those who are beautiful, says Sappho, are so only to the eyes; but those who are good also do beautiful things. Poetry presents beauty as a physical merit that includes the beauty of the soul, which springs from virtues as the realisation of abilities that are unique to human beings (Sappho, fr. D 27 a, 36,

49, 116 a, 152). From the varied use of the term "beautiful," something unified seems to emerge: that beauty designates the consummation and visible harmony of a certain level of being. The distinction between inner beauty and outer beauty refers to different levels of being.

### *The ontological meaning of beauty in Homer*

When reading the *Odyssey*, the frequent and seemingly unmotivated use of the word 'beautiful' (ἰαλός) is striking, and this apparent lack of intention (as if the poet had described some things he particularly liked as beautiful) immediately closes the door to a more detailed study of what Homer means when he calls something 'beautiful'. But once we have freed ourselves from this first impression, we see that there are certain situations in which the poet always speaks of beauty.

Let us start with some specific examples, and by classifying things considered beautiful, we will try to show what this adjective means to the poet of the *Odyssey*, what it refers to.

*The 'beautiful' and the voice.* In Canto V of the *Odyssey*, 55 ff., we read this:

He finally reached the *remote* island and landed there, leaving the violet waters behind. He walked straight towards the *spacious* cave, home of the nymph with *braided hair*. There she was, a *large* fire lit up the hearth, the smell of larch and cedar *wood* burning, leaving the island *far behind* with its aroma. She sang inside with a *beautiful voice* and wove diligently at the loom with a *golden* thread. The cave was surrounded by a *lush* grove of *fragrant* cypresses, alders and poplars, where *swift-winged* birds, hawks and owls, and *shrill* sea crows of the species that live off the sea, nesting in the waves, had made their nests. In the same enclosure and around the *concave* grotto stretched a lush vineyard, blooming with branches. *Four* fountains in a row, all four *close* to each other in their sprouting, sent the *light* of their jets in different directions; a *delicate* garden of violets and celery sprouted around them.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Spanish translation (slightly modified) by José Manuel Pabón in: Homer, *Odyssey*, Madrid, Gredos, 1982, p. 171. [*Translator's note*]

What stands out in these epithets? The cave and the fire are large, the nymph has braided hair, the wood is well cut, the aroma travels far when the wood burns, the cypress trees are fragrant. The forest and the vineyard are lush. The birds have swift wings (and only when these are spread does the bird reveal its full size), the crows are shrill. The four fountains spout luminous jets in all four directions. Three types of birds and three types of trees are mentioned; each is a complete verse, the epithet comes before the third member, while an epithet has already been given to the whole: we must bring to mind not the different types of trees, but the forest, nor the different types of birds, but the birds as the life of the forest. It is not a question of designating something particularly 'beautiful' or idyllic with each epithet (a screeching crow is not beautiful, and in what sense are four fountains beautiful because they flow in four directions? Is well-cut wood beautiful? Etc.). And yet even a god is amazed; not at the beauty, but at the perfection of this world: everything is *good, useful, orderly*; and there is also a nymph who knows the god and obeys him.

The nymph Calypso sings with a beautiful voice and weaves with a ray of gold. Surely this voice is pleasant to hear, aesthetically beautiful, but the text does not speak of this; when the goddess sings in her perfect world with a beautiful voice, her song adds to this world, and therefore 'beautiful' is a property of the same type as the other epithets, an expression of the perfection of all things in this world, which a human being can only reach thanks to a special destiny and in which they cannot remain forever, as they are human beings. Like the other epithets, "Beautiful" here serves to designate this higher level of being, which is divine, perfect.

Weaving and singing are also activities of Circe (X, 221, 227 ff.). Circe sings so beautifully that the ground around her resonates. If we were to understand this in an aesthetic sense, we would have to question Homer's taste. Let us compare it with Calypso's song: there, a god meets a goddess, the god sees the perfection of this divine island world and the goddess who sings and weaves. In Canto X, after a long journey and much fear, the men arrive at Circe's house in a valley: a wonderful world, which is deadly for people without divine help. They only see the goddess weaving and hear her singing, and they dare to

call her. They do not see, as Hermes did in the case of Calypso, the deified world; they only hear the song and trust that, if someone sings and weaves, it can only be a goddess or a woman. Thus, the beautiful voice is a divine voice or a human voice, and it promises everything that the image of a woman and a goddess entails: peace and hospitality after the journey, overcoming insecurity and fear; love and friendship as opposed to the brutality of the elements and nature. And the fact that the ground resonates with this song says nothing about the range of Circe's voice, but is a sign of the fascination of this divine, 'beautiful' voice. A final example of the phenomenon of 'beauty' in relation to the voice (XXI, 411): Ulysses has his bow in his hand, he has checked that the worms have not gnawed it, and now he tests the string: it sings beautifully, as if it were the voice of a swallow. The suitors are horrified, Zeus gives the sign... At the sound of thunder, Ulysses rejoices.

Why are the suitors frightened by a *beautiful* song, similar to that of a swallow? Because Ulysses can draw his bow: for them the sound is *terrible*, only for Ulysses is *it beautiful*, as beautiful as the first song of the swallows in spring. For him and for the suitors, a new era begins, and Zeus confirms it with his thunder.

"Beautiful" singing does not mean beautiful, pure, clear sound in the *aesthetic* sense, but rather a healthy, strong sound that promises a future, a sound that tells Ulysses that the bow is *perfect* for its purpose, a sign that the new world that will restore Ulysses has arrived.

*'Beautiful' objects.* The word 'beautiful' appears many times in Homer in reference to objects, for example gifts of hospitality, such as those received by Helen from the wife of the king of Egypt, Telemachus from Menelaus, and Odysseus from the Phaeacians. These gifts of gold or silver are beautiful, they are an honour and their function is to serve as a memento (*Odyssey*, VIII, 430 ff.: 'For my part, I give you this golden cup of unrivalled brilliance, which will remind you of me every day when you drink to Zeus and the other gods in your halls')<sup>3</sup> and exchange: those who gave in the past have the right to receive something in return (XXIV, 283 ff., Laertes to Odysseus in disguise: "Vain were the countless gifts you gave to that man. If you found him alive in the lands of Ithaca, he himself would send you away well rewarded with

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3. Spanish translation cited, p. 220. [*Translator's note*]

others present and with good hospitality: it is the duty of those who have received it).<sup>4</sup> Gifts of hospitality express a close relationship between people, which is inherited from father to son (XV, 196: "We glory in being united by inheritance in love and hospitality").<sup>5</sup> This close relationship of hospitality that unites two people on a plane that is above everyday life (there is no rivalry between them, but rather they recognise and honour each other: it is the bond between *royal men*) and which, over generations, belongs to another level of time, is expressed in the connection between *beauty* and giving, the gift (*Odyssey*, I, 311 ff.; IV, 130, 590 ff., 614; VIII, 419 ff., 430, 439; XV, 75, 113 ff., 206, etc.).

What could 'beautiful' mean here? If we understood it in a purely sensory sense, we would have to see it as the simple repetition of an expression that means nothing, a peculiar weakness of epic language. But is it possible that Homer used an empty formula when describing a custom so important to social life? The repetition alludes to something important. For Homer, the self in a situation is not a subject facing an object, but rather a part of that situation, without being (like modern man) conscious of itself in contrast to the world around it; it is not the musician who plays an instrument and creates the situation, but the sound box that vibrates and reinforces the vibration of the string, which responds to the situation and takes the momentary situation in an absolute sense with its own ideas and assessments.

This gives the formula of the beautiful gift its profound meaning. It is not that the host, in order to give a gift to his guest, seeks a beautiful gift, but rather that it is about the situation. The guest is leaving. The situation demands that the host give the guest a beautiful gift: that this gift be *beautiful* is part of the aforementioned *absolutisation of ideas and values*: hospitality is something elevated, grand, beautiful; its expression must also be something beautiful, grand, valuable. Every gift of hospitality is beautiful, for *it exists in the sphere of a relationship that is above the everyday, above time*. It is an expression of a higher sphere of being.

We also find the term "beautiful" in a formula relating to the house:  $\alpha\lambda\alpha \delta\acute{\omega}\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ . The houses of Ulysses are beautiful, from

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4. Spanish translation cited, pp. 486-487. [*Translator's note*]

5. Spanish translation cited, p. 337. [*Translator's note*]

Laertes (XIV, 361), Eumaeus' father, who was a king (XV, 454), Nestor (III, 387), Alcinous (VIII, 41) and Aeolus, the god of the wind (X 13). In XVII, 264 ff., Odysseus, in disguise, describes his own house: it is easy to recognise among the other houses of Ithaca, it has a courtyard with walls and battlements and a strong double door, so that no one could force it open, and Penelope says in XIX, 580, that Odysseus' house is full of things necessary for living.

Thus, a beautiful house is rich, large, has solid walls and doors and a large courtyard, is impregnable, but easy to recognise, everyone identifies it. Its owner is a regal man or even a god. A beautiful house means security, both from worries about daily bread and from enemies, and a prestigious and honourable life. The 'beautiful house' is a formula, an expression of the situation in which the royal man finds himself in everyday life; it is his environment and his living space.

Beautiful clothes are also part of beautiful houses and beautiful gifts. Beautiful clothes are often found among gifts (XIX, 242), and they are so essential that Penelope does not recognise Ulysses because he is wearing poor clothes, that beggars are called 'poorly dressed' (XVIII, 41), that the beggar Ulysses demands beautiful clothes as a reward for the truth of his account of Ulysses' life (XIV, 152; XVII, 550), that in the archery contest for Penelope, beautiful clothes are offered (XXI, 339), and that the beggar Ulysses cannot serve the suitors because he is poorly dressed (XV, 331). The phrase "fine clothes" refers to a more luminous life, a life free from worries about daily bread. It does not refer to tasteful clothing that appeals to everyone, but to someone who is one of the *aristoi*, who is closer to the gods and therefore endowed with greater possibilities in life. Beautiful things are part of a beautiful life; they round off the image of this life that is full from a human point of view, in which everything is beautiful. A beautiful life surrounded by beautiful things is *an orderly life, close to the gods*; a beautiful cup, that is, one made of gold, valuable, a cup for the most valuable human beings, in a supreme situation.

Thus, Telemachus also says that his father's bow is a *beautiful* weapon (XXI, 117). The bow is the weapon that proves his father is unique, that turns the beggar Odysseus into King Odysseus, which is why it must be beautiful. In certain situations, weapons are called beautiful: when they are wielded to conquer as pro-

victory tables, as a means of carrying out long-desired revenge or finding salvation that was beginning to seem hopeless. Weapons are beautiful: that is, those who wield them have joy and confidence that *they will be useful*. Thus, beauty is not an aesthetic property (in our modern sense) of weapons, but rather refers to the attitude towards weapons of those who are acting; the property that weapons have for them at that moment is *objectively* attributed to the weapons.

*Beauty in men and gods.* In the *Odyssey* (XXIII, 156), Athena approaches Ulysses, who is being washed *after his victory* over the suitors, and pours beauty upon him to make him appear greater and stronger, and also gives him curly hair to make him look like a hyacinth flower. The opposite happens in XIII, 398 and 430 ff., when the goddess transforms Odysseus into an old beggar: Athena wants to stiffen his limbs and wrinkle his beautiful skin, remove his blond hair, dress him poorly and cloud his eyes, which were once beautiful, so that Odysseus appears unworthy and irrelevant to the suitors. In XVIII, 67, during the preparations for the fight, *his beautiful, large thighs, broad shoulders, chest and strong arms* become visible. For Athena strengthens Ulysses' limbs so much that the suitors are stunned.

External factors define beauty here; a purely sensory conception of beauty seems to dominate, but these external signs proclaim that this man is *perfect*. He is the ideal image of a young, self-confident man, thirsty for action and fearless, capable of facing all his enemies and achieving everything he wants. Hence also the possibility of making a man first beautiful and then ugly through divine influence: it is not a question of the beautiful individual detached from his surroundings, whose beauty consists of aesthetic-sensory facts, but of a function that the individual performs within the objective situation and which requires beauty as the culmination of this function.

Therefore, beauty means, in the case of human beings, a greater fullness of life, a greater possibility of realising oneself and one's desires. The gods have this possibility and this fulfilment because they are gods; there is no need to add anything to them. And that is why each god has a nickname ("cloud gatherer", "earth shaker", "blue-eyed", "he who strikes from afar") that indicates in which direction it extends.

of *their actions and their being*. But it is not only the gods themselves, but also their utensils (when humans come into contact with them) that attract attention for their divinity and beauty. The sea, Helios' bed, is very beautiful (III, 1), as is Circe's bed (X, 347); and Hermes' staff, with which he can close the eyes of human beings, is beautiful and golden (XXIV, 2 ff.). And when Athena, invisible, illuminates Ulysses and spreads a very beautiful light, so that the walls of the house shine with beauty. When Telemachus asks in amazement what is the origin of this beautiful glow, Ulysses orders him to be quiet: 'this way of acting is proper to the gods' (XIX, 44).<sup>6</sup>Wherever it appears, beauty is immediately recognised as something divine, as an interference of the divine being in the human sphere.

Thus, the "beautiful" is not aesthetic, but rather, due to the objectivity of the epic situation, it is active, and it is so insofar as the part of the situation that refers to the gods, often as the goal of this situation. Beautiful is everything that is worthy of human beings in their search for a life similar to the divine, secure, everything that is an expression of that life, that achieves and ensures it. 'Beautiful' is not a quality that is added to a being, but the level of perfection, and everything that is 'not beautiful' is defective.

### *Heraclitus. Empedocles*

From the few fragments of the pre-Socratics that interest us here, it seems clear that for them too, the concept of beauty designates the visible perfection and harmony of a level of being. Heraclitus gives primacy to the eye over the ear: 'The eyes are more accurate witnesses than the ears';<sup>7</sup> for him, beauty seems to be found above all in the visual realm. Empedocles proclaims in a striking way the primacy of vision and light:

As when someone who plans to go out arms himself with a torch during the winter night, a flame of burning fire, placing lanterns that protect from all kinds of winds; these disperse the breath of the agitated winds, but the light jumps outwards as it is more subtle and shines along the threshold of the house.

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6. Spanish translation cited, p. 402. [*Translator's note*]

7. Heraclitus, fr. 101 a [Spanish translation by Conrado Eggers Lan and Victoria E. Juliá in: *Los filósofos presocráticos*, vol. I, Madrid, Gredos, 1981, p. 392].

with indomitable rays. Thus then [during the formation of the eye] the ancient fire, enclosed in membranes and fine veils, was confined to the round pupil, these veils being perforated by miraculous passages.<sup>8</sup>

In the pre-Socratics, we find the concept of harmony as the origin of everything that becomes apparent. "Heraclitus says that opposites agree and that the most *beautiful* harmony arises from discordant things."<sup>(9)</sup> Heraclitus' fragments also contain an allusion to art, which is defined as imitation because its way of proceeding is similar to that of nature:

And apparently art also does this [creating harmony from discord] by imitating nature: for painting, after mixing the natural properties of white and black, yellow and red colours, obtains representations that are consistent with their models; music, on the other hand, after combining high-pitched sounds with low-pitched ones, and long ones with short ones, achieves a unique harmony between different voices; and writing, after combining vowel and consonant spellings, creates a complete art form from them.<sup>10</sup>

Empedocles and the Pythagoreans were probably the first to attribute ontological significance to beauty on the basis of a metaphysical theory. For Empedocles, harmony is the unification of materials, the perfect and beautiful: the bonds of harmony, which connect the various materials to each other, are at the same time the power that brings them into being. Harmony (beauty) is a condition of form, of becoming visible (Empedocles, fr. 7-9, 15, 17, 20-23, 26, 35, 59, 77, 78, 98; see also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 984 b 32).

### *The Pythagoreans. The canon of Polykleitos*

Thanks to the doctrine of number and proportion, which at the end of the 5th century BC spread in the circle and under the influence of

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8. Empedocles, fr. 84 [Spanish translation by Ernesto La Croce in: *Los filósofos presocráticos*, vol. II, Madrid, Gredos, 1979, pp. 277-278].

9. Heraclitus, fr. 8 [Spanish translation cited, p. 347].

10. Heraclitus, fr. 10 [Spanish translation by Francisco J. Navarro Gómez for this volume].

The Pythagoreans, questions of beauty and art began to interest philosophy. However, neither the theories that emerged nor Polykleitos' canon were mathematical theories of art of an aesthetic nature. Since for the Pythagoreans mathematics is the law of the world, it also contains the law of beauty and of the works of creators. To understand this, we must briefly discuss the ontological meaning of the Pythagorean doctrine of numbers. Every phenomenon that the senses provide us with has a becoming, whether as change or as movement in space; becoming is a fundamental phenomenon in the realm of being. The becoming of a body, a colour, a sound, etc., does not present an order in itself; everything that the senses provide us with arises and disappears. Whether we say that something is arising or disappearing depends on the criteria we apply. For example, warming can be understood as a possibility of heat or cold. One can speak of the becoming of cold or heat, and therefore the distinction between what *is* and what *becomes*.

is relative.

When the Greeks defined being as *ápeiron*, the unlimited, they had to recognise the limit, the figure, the *eidos*, as that which prevents phenomena from dissolving into the unlimited. If we understand number as the factor that sets limits, it becomes the expression of the ontological order in force. In number, which determines the *measurable* figure, the cosmos manifests itself as a nexus of order. In number, as the organising element of the flow of phenomena, lies salvation from chaos. Numbers were recognised as having sacred and divine dignity, and a cult was dedicated to them. But when awareness of ontological connections was later lost, the doctrine of numbers degenerated outside Greece (especially in the East) into an irrational magic of numbers.

Plato defined rhythm as "the order of movement".<sup>11</sup> Numbers, as an expression of the organising power of the original, order sounds (music), colours (painting), proportions (sculpture) and human movements (dance), conferring a sacred status on these arts and transforming their works into figures that engage human beings. They are not spectacles, they are not irrelevant "fine arts", but bodies, colours, sounds...

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11. Plato, *Laws*, II, 665 a [Spanish translation by Francisco Lisi in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. VIII, Madrid, Gredos, 1999, p. 268].

Two and movements ordered in number and measure are representations of what *eternally* concerns human beings.

One of Pythagoras' disciples coined the famous phrase: "All things are governed by number" (ἀριθμὸν δὲ τς πάν-τ'σνόςοτ1sv).<sup>12</sup> As a sign that generates order, number refers to the *immutable*, where the objective, universal and original was seen. When the *Book of Wisdom* says of God: "But you have regulated everything with weight, number and measure,"<sup>13</sup> these phrases are of Pythagorean origin. Biblical exegesis has shown that the *Book of Wisdom* was written in the second century BCE by a Jew from Alexandria who was probably in contact with the Pythagorean renewal movement that began in that city.

Following the founding of natural philosophy by Anaxagoras and Democritus, Archytas of Tarentum's circle developed a Pythagorean science that coexisted with the mysticism of numbers. Aristotle indicated (*Metaphysics*, 1090 a 20) that the Pythagoreans related numbers to the essence of things because they found numerical relationships in bodies; and he emphasised that numbers are not only formal causes, but also material causes of things (987 a 15): things are even mimesis of numbers (985 b 23).

Thus, the doctrine of numbers deals here with the primordial order of reality; the relationship with the world of phenomena is the origin of a sacred and ontological doctrine of proportion and symmetry. This kind of 'mathematics' is not a science with practical-technical or aesthetic intentions, it is not (as for Galileo, for example) a means of mastering the phenomena of nature, it is not (as for the humanist artist) an instrument for shaping aesthetic beauty. The mythical-sacred thinking of the Pythagoreans would be misunderstood if their doctrines of harmony, beauty and proportion were seen as a profane representation of 'possible' orders, of human interpretations of reality.

Just as nature (according to Pythagorean theory) imitates numbers, the ordering powers, the artist who follows the

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12. Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, IV, 2 [Spanish translation by Jorge Bergua Cavero in: Empiricus, *Contra los profesores*, Madrid, Gre-dos, 1997, p. 189].

13. *Wisdom*, 11, 20 [Spanish translation by Gabriel Pérez in: *La Biblia*, Salamanca, Sigueme, 1992, p. 1323].

rules of numbers and doctrines of proportion attempts to give his work value and validity by exposing being, the primal figure. We have no surviving statements from the Pythagoreans on the plastic arts, but a later source, Sextus Empiricus, concisely alludes to the law of symmetry: 'As for the arts, the truth is that none has been established that disregards proportion, and proportion is based on number: therefore, all art has been established by means of number'.<sup>14</sup>

The idea (dating back to mythical times) that everything is a number is what led to the symmetry of the Pythagoreans, which is determined by numbers. During the 5th century BC, anything that could not be measured with numbers, anything asymmetrical, was despised (see fragment 102 of Democritus). For the Pythagoreans, the numbers 4, 6, 10 and 12 are perfect because they are easy to divide. Aristotle himself declared the octave to be beautiful because its relationships can be expressed with whole numbers (*Problemata*, 920 to 27). Plato says in *Hippias* that the science of counting and measuring is inextricably linked to all the arts, for without it they would be worthless skills.

In the golden age of Pythagorean philosophy, beauty was synonymous with simplicity and order, even in cases where geometry or stereometry determined it. We can deduce this from reports of ideal numbers, ideal surfaces and ideal bodies, for something perfect must also have seemed beautiful to them. The standard of perfection and beauty was regularity, often also the relationship to a central point, symmetry on many sides, which reaches its peak in the circle and the sphere. Pythagorean symmetry was reinforced in this idea by the aesthetics of order that emerged from the craft tradition of measurement.

In this quotation, only the term "aesthetics of order" is misleading, as it immediately evokes modern ideas which, as we have seen, completely obscure the meaning of Pythagorean thought.

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14. Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Dogm.*, A 106 [Spanish translation by Juan Francisco Martos Montiel in: Sextus Empiricus, *Contra los dogmáticos*, Madrid, Gredos, 2012, p. 104].

15. F. W. Schlicker, *Hellenistische Vorstellungen von der Schönheit der Bauwerke nach Vitruv*, doctoral thesis, Würzburg, 1940, p. 64.

Based on knowledge of Pythagorean doctrines, Polykleitos developed his theory of the "canon", which we know only from references by Plutarch, Philo and Galen.<sup>16</sup>

In every living being there is a predisposition to seek knowledge, and, in short, the mean (τὸ μέσον) is not a matter for the indeterminate man, but for those who strive to the highest degree and who, through their great experience and knowledge in absolutely all areas, are in a position to discover the mean. Thus, in effect, sculptors, painters of statues and image makers in general paint and capture in each image the most beautiful, such as a well-formed man or a horse or a bull or a lion, always paying attention to the average type in such genres. And in some places, a model of a human statue called the 'Canon of Polykleitos' is praised, which has received this name because it has an exact symmetry of all parts in relation to each other.<sup>17</sup>

Another reference can be found in Plutarch:

Of course, those who progress – those who, as if it were a sacred edifice and a royal life, have forged a foundation of gold [Pindar, fr. 194, Schr.]—do not accept anything that has happened as chance, but apply and adjust everything based on reason as a plumb line, thinking that *Polykleitos* said very well that the most difficult work is that of those whose clay reaches their fingernails.<sup>18</sup>

Little else is known about Polykleitos' canon. The Greek term *kanón* means 'norm', 'principle'; proportions (συμμετρίαι, αναλογίαι, 'symmetries', 'analogies') that form a system are already a 'canon'. The only passage that clarifies things somewhat comes from Galen:

For he [Chrysippus] clearly stated this in his discourse written shortly before, in which he says that good health of the body is a symmetry between hot and cold, and dry and wet,

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16. See Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker. Griechisch und Deutsch*, ed. W. Kranz, vol. I, 1954, pp. 391–393.

17. Polycrates, fr. A 3 [Spanish translation by Francisco J. Navarro Gómez for this volume].

18. Polykleitos, fr. B 1 [Spanish translation cited above].

things that are clearly elements of the body; but he believes that beauty lies not in the symmetry of the elements, but in that of the parts, *clearly that of the finger to the finger and that of all of them to the metacarpal and carpal bones, and that of these to the forearm, and that of the forearm to the arm, and that of all of them to the whole, as it is written in Polykleitos' Canon*. For, after showing us in that book all the symmetries of the body, Polykleitos corroborated his words by carving a statue according to these rules and naming the statue itself after the book: Canon. And certainly, according to all physicians and philosophers, the beauty of the body lies in the symmetry of its parts.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Polykleitos did not base his canon on measurements that were foreign to the human body, an expression of his subjective interpretation. Another fragment by Philo suggests that, for Polykleitos, the perfection of a work is the result of mathematical relationships and that deviating slightly from them is enough to destroy harmony. Undoubtedly, this idea of a 'canon' has Pythagorean roots, as it is based on arithmetic symmetries that are essential to things. Philo writes: 'so that whoever is about to speak finds the sentence established by the sculptor Polykleitos appropriate: for he said that *success comes after many numerical relationships by a small one*'.<sup>20</sup> Polykleitos seems to have left an example of his canon in the *Doryphoros*, a statue that represents a high level of imitation of the essential.

Based on two passages from Pliny (HN, 34, 55 ff.; 34, 65) and Xenocrates of Sicyon (the source from which Pliny probably drew his information), it has been shown that Polykleitos and other Greek sculptors who based their work on his canon created their works on the basis of certain *signa quadrata*. The meaning of this statement was unclear; for a long time it was assumed<sup>21</sup> that the word *quadra-tus* (τστράκωνος) refers to the strength, solidity and power of the figures created by Polykleitos, although these properties cannot be attributed to all his works. Recently it has been demonstrated<sup>22</sup>

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19. Polykleitos, fr. A 3 [Spanish translation cited].

20. Polykleitos, fr. B 2 [Spanish translation cited].

21. Sellers, *The elder Plinius*, 1896, pp. XVI ff.; Kalkmann, *Die Quellen der Kunstgeschichte des Plinius*, 1898, p. 69; Schweitzer, *Xenokrates von Athen*, 1923.

22. See, for example, S. Ferri, 'Nuovi contributi esegetici al canone della scultura greca', in: *Rivista del Reale Istituto d'Archeologia e Storia dell'Arte*, 1940, VII, fasc. I-III, p. 149; L. Steffanini, 'Ispirazione pitagorica del canone di Policleto', in: *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 1949, XXVIII, p. 3.

*quadratus* = τσπράυωνος refers to a system of measurement according to which the figure is constructed. "The geometric scheme to which Polykleitos subjected the figure consisted of four squares which, placed more or less regularly one on top of the other, corresponded to the four main parts of the body (tibia, femur, thorax and skull) and were articulated in various ways with each other."<sup>23</sup> It should not be overlooked that the fourfold repetition of the *quadratio* was at the same time the symbolic representation of justice, of perfect physical and moral balance. This relationship with the ethical sphere is not simply a metaphor, but rather the rooting of the human being in a divine substance, in number, that is, in the geometric figure measurable with numbers. Polykleitos' canon was not an 'artistic-aesthetic' standard, as classicism understood it much later.

## 2. Interpretation of two passages from Xenophon's *Symposium*

Xenophon is undoubtedly the author who, before Plato, expressed himself most clearly on the theory of beauty and art. Xenophon understands beauty as a sensory, perceptible figure. Being an expert hunter, he knows the form and habits of animals, and finds wild beasts that have lived and died in freedom 'more beautiful' than those that remain alive in captivity.<sup>24</sup> When admiring Cyrus' garden, Lysander highlights 'the beauty of its trees', the symmetry and regularity of its planting, adding: 'Cyrus, everything amazes me with its beauty'.<sup>25</sup> In The *Banquet*, the concepts of 'figure' (μορφή) and 'phenomenon' are used.

(σῖδος) as synonyms for beauty.<sup>26</sup>

As we shall see later, Xenophon presents the authentic problem of art: in *Memories of Socrates*, III, 10, 1-2, he explains the artist's approach to forming a beautiful image as an ordering of the beauty that is scattered throughout nature.

23. Steffanini, op. cit., p. 93.

24. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, I, 4, 11 [Spanish translation by Ana Vegas San-salvador in: Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, Madrid, Gredos, p. 103].

25. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 4, 21 [Spanish translation by Juan Zaragoza in: Xenophon, *Memories of Socrates. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology of Socrates*, Madrid, Gredos, 1993, p. 231].

26. Xenophon, *Symposium*, VIII, 29, 36.

This procedure is called ἀνομιμῆσθαι, and it is capable of exposing the spiritual not directly, but only through its bodily reflection (the invisible through the visible).

### *The problem*

Two exemplary texts will shed light on what the terms "beautiful," "art," "mimesis," and "likeness" mean here, characterise the problems that drive pre-Socratic thought, and their interpretation may perhaps encourage other researchers to study similar texts.

Our guiding idea remains the question of whether beauty in pre-Socratic philosophy and poetry is an aesthetic category that primarily concerns the field of art and a human activity that we describe as 'aesthetic', or whether this term refers to deeper values and leaves behind the subjective, the individual, which from our point of view is always attached to the aesthetic.

### *The power of beauty*

We have chosen a text by Xenophon that emphasises the power of beauty, its fascination, in a way that should surprise us because we no longer experience beauty (in the aesthetic sense) as something that subjugates us and captivates us existentially. Of course, this power still exists for us, but it no longer intervenes in our existence, as the text says.

This is the famous passage from the introduction to *The Banquet* in which Xenophon describes the effect of the beauty of the young Autolycus. The situation is as follows: during the Great Panathenaea (the main festival in Athens, held every four years, in which a solemn procession to the Acropolis offered a new robe to the goddess Athena, as we see in the frieze of the Parthenon), Callias, who admires and loves the young Autolycus, his father Niceratus, Socrates and others gather after a horse race. Callias invites them to his house. And Xenophon describes the effect of the young Autolycus' beauty on the guests. They are reclining around the table, two by two; only Autolycus is seated next to his father, as was required by propriety for the women and children present at a banquet.

[1] Anyone who noticed what was happening would have immediately realised that beauty is *by nature something regal*, especially when it is possessed, as was precisely the case with Autolycus, together with modesty and discretion. [2] (a) Because at first, *just as a flash of light* (b) *attracts everyone's gaze when it appears in the middle of the night*, so Autolycus' beauty drew *everyone's gaze towards him*, (c) and then none of those who looked at him could help but *feel something in their soul because of him*; some became increasingly silent and others tried to hide it in some way. [3] The truth is that (a) those who are *possessed by some divinity* seem to be moving to behold, but (b) while those possessed by other gods tend to have a terrible gaze, a frightening voice and be violent, those who are inspired by *chaste love* have eyes full of benevolence, a very sweet voice and the most noble gestures, which is precisely why Callias, with his loving attitude, was more worthy of being looked at by those initiated into the cult of that god. (c) The guests dined *in silence*, as if ordered to do so *by some more powerful being*.<sup>27</sup>

### *Text structure*

At first glance, this extraordinary description does not seem to contain any theory about the concept of beauty, but rather appears to be a 'poetic' text. From a formal point of view, we can divide it into three parts.

The first part [1] contains a definition of beauty as a kind of natural reign. The second part [2] lists a series of qualities of beauty using, it seems, metaphors. This list gives rise to the subdivision of this second part: (a) beauty is compared to *a glow in the middle of the night*; the same comparison is already found in Heraclitus. (b) Beauty has the property of *attracting the gaze*. (c) Beauty *influences the soul*, which suffers something through it; beauty has a poignant effect.

The third part [3] leads to a new definition that equates beauty with *divinity*; beauty fascinates us. The subdivision

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27. *Ibid.*, I, 8 ff. (the italics, figures in square brackets and letters in parentheses are mine) [Spanish translation, slightly modified, by Juan Zaragoza in: Xenophon, *Memories of Socrates. Economic. Banquet. Apology of Socrates*, Madrid, Gredos, 1993, pp. 309-310].

The definition is as follows: (a) the definition of the state of someone who contemplates a beautiful human being and is possessed as if by a god: the state that arises in this way, suffering (*νάθος*), is *commotion*; (b) beauty is *identified with eros because of its ability to cause enthusiasm*. Eros produces nothing terrible, but rather a sweet voice and nobler gestures. (c) Finally, and in summary, beauty is defined as a *power* before which we can only remain silent.

This outline allows us to study each part in greater detail. Clearly, this is a phenomenology, an *exposition of how beauty acts*, how and where it leads those who contemplate it: beauty as a guiding force.

*Beauty as the dominator and that which sets the direction.*

As we have seen, in the first part beauty is defined as a natural reign. Its dominating element is thus emphasised, and we must bear in mind that the dominating element is the *first* in the series of phenomena. Here, the internal relationship between the principle (in Latin, *principium*) and the dominant (in Latin, *princeps*) is essential, which is at the same time the director, *that which in itself has direction and can therefore set the direction*. I emphasise this aspect of *the principium* as *princeps*, since rationalism has obscured the capacity of *the principium* to act, which is understood only as the beginning of a series. The essence of the authentic principle (in our case, of beauty) derives from its *operative, directive* character. We cannot understand it if we make it the *object* of analysis instead of understanding more deeply the meaning of its *action*. Xenophon insists throughout the text on this essential feature of beauty, on its operative power: the various definitions listed spring from experience, from the action of beauty.

Guided by beauty, human beings are capable of finding a path, a direction; at the same time, they are torn from indifference and apathy. This means at the same time knowing a principle, following it, surrendering to it, that is, following a method, taking a path that – as the text says – is 'natural', objective. With our interpretation, we ourselves want to follow this path and discover in the text, which reveals itself to be 'beautiful', what is shown to us through it.

### *The transcendental character of beauty*

The second part defines beauty through a metaphor (light) and refers to the attractive, attention-grabbing, pathetic nature of beauty: 'For in the beginning, just as a flash of light attracts everyone's gaze when it appears in the middle of the night, so the beauty of Autolyclus drew everyone's gaze towards him, and then none of those who looked at him could help but feel something in their soul because of him'.

Beauty is the light that shines in the middle of the night: this is a meaningful metaphor that appears many times in ancient times. But is it really a metaphor? Does this name hide or misinterpret an important phenomenon? As light, beauty is the illumination that makes it possible to see and distinguish what is shown in shapes, figures, and contours. Hence, since the earliest beginnings of Western thought, the phenomenon of beauty has been linked to that of the figure, of form (*σιδος*). If beauty produces vision, it has a transcendental character, that is, it makes experience possible, since vision makes experience possible. What makes experience possible cannot be subject to the experience of vision, but is the cause of that process by which a multiplicity becomes present. Hence, in ancient times, beauty was repeatedly identified with the resplendent, with the solar, which cannot be seen (for it blinds), but is only revealed by making things visible to us through its luminous force, the multiplicity of figures. Xenophon also understands beauty as a principle, as something dominant, not as an object: based on its effect, he wants to contemplate and expose it.

Equally important is the second essential feature of beauty: its power of attraction, that is, its ability to draw the eye and become the focus of attention. The two are closely related, for what attracts us creates a *tension* that drives us towards something: our *attention* has its roots in this tension. The power of beauty to attract attention is linked to the *pathetic element* that Xenophon expressly refers to: 'and then none of those who looked at it could help feeling something in their soul because of it'. It is clear that beauty takes us out of our indifference.

So, is the definition of beauty as 'light' just a metaphor? We tend to think so because in everyday life

We justifiably cling to the idea that things exist independently of whether they are illuminated and visible or not. But the light Xenophon speaks of has a much more original, metaphysical meaning. At every level of life, things appear as a consequence of the biological tension within which living beings exist. Each animal perceives things or forms and figures that acquire meaning through its own *vital tension*. The senses that show us phenomena are also organs or instruments that allude to this vital tension. Life varies in accordance with the different levels of vital tension: but even at the same level, meanings and figures ('objects of feeding and mating') appear and disappear on the basis of the 'biological impulsive rhythm'.

Therefore, beauty (which is attractive, draws attention and arouses passions) is really the light that makes vision possible. Xenophon understands it literally as the guiding force that draws us out of indifference and indifference (from the night). Thus, the conventional idea that beauty is something accessory, that it can only correspond to being as an occasional attribute, disappears, *since beauty is revealed to be closely linked to the appearance of being, to showing itself*. These definitions place the phenomenon of beauty on a new and unusual plane: the ontological plane.

#### *The erotic nature of beauty*

Xenophon's conclusive definition of beauty identifies its action with that of a god who *possesses* us. Another metaphor? What does the concept of god mean here? Undoubtedly, that which dominates and comes first, since it directs us and manifests itself by directing us. As such, the original cannot be shown by anything else (the process of demonstrating would be ἀπόδειξις, and ἀποδείξις means: to show something on the basis of something, from something), it shows itself. Certainly, the expression 'evidence' also applies to objects, but principles, the original, *do not have this kind of evidence*. The evidence of the original has a force of its own that we cannot escape, that is, *it imposes itself on us*; as Xenophon says: *it possesses us*. In this same sense, Aristotle attributes to principles a ca-

"elenchic" character; this means that principles cannot be demonstrated on the basis of anything else, but *only by themselves, thereby demonstrating their power over us*. Whatever we do, we cannot escape them, for whatever we do presupposes them;  $\sigma\lambda\upsilon\sigma\tau\upsilon$  originally means 'to put in the pillory', that is, to be exposed.

What possesses us, what reveals itself by compelling us (and is therefore necessary), reigns supreme in our emotion ("those who are possessed by some divinity seem to be moved by contemplation"). This emotion objectively leads to another definition: the *erotic nature of beauty*, for what is eros if not an impulse to submit?

*Beauty is not a subjective creation of an individual, but ontological reality.*

The interpretation of Xenophon's text leads us to a first conclusion: the beauty referred to here has an ontological meaning. Beauty belongs to the realm of the manifestation of being, of the original, of the divine. This particular power of beauty, which was discovered in Antiquity (far removed from any form of aestheticism), is at the heart of our question.

#### *The pantomime of Ariadne and Dionysus*

The erotic nature of beauty discussed by the Greeks is particularly evident in a text that we will quote below and that needs no interpretation. It is a description at the end of Xenophon's *Symposium*.

Socrates has concluded his praise of eros, in which he has made clear the difference between sensory pleasure and friendship of souls. Before the gathering disperses, as a conclusion to the banquet, a brief pantomime of Ariadne and Dionysus is performed, masterfully exposing the sensory-erotic power of beauty:

Next, an armchair was placed in the room, and then the Syracusan entered and said: 'Gentlemen, Ariadne is about to enter her and Dionysus's bridal chamber. Dionysus will arrive shortly...'

After the banquet with the gods, he will approach her and they will begin to play together. Ariadne then entered the scene dressed as a bride and sat down on the armchair. Dionysus had not yet appeared when the flute began to play a Bacchic rhythm, and then they were able to admire the master of dance, for as soon as Ariadne heard it, she began to make such gestures that anyone would have noticed that she was happy to hear it. She did not go out to meet the god, nor did she even get up, but it was evident that she found it difficult to remain still. Of course, as soon as Dionysus saw her, he advanced towards her, dancing as passionately as anyone could, and sat on her lap, embraced her and kissed her. She seemed embarrassed, but she also responded to his embrace lovingly. Seeing this, the guests applauded and shouted "again!". But when Dionysus stood up and helped Ariadne to her feet, from that moment on it was a matter of watching the steps and figures of the lovers kissing and embracing each other. And when they saw Dionysus, truly beautiful, and Ariadne, so charming, kissing each other on the mouth in earnest and not pretending, all the spectators were very excited. They thought they heard Dionysus ask her if she loved him and her swear so passionately that not only Dionysus but everyone present would have been able to swear that the boy and girl loved each other. They did not seem like actors trained for this pantomime, but people who had been allowed to do what they had long desired. Finally, when the guests saw that the two were embracing and seemed to be retiring to bed, the unmarried vowed to marry, and the married mounted their horses and galloped off in search of their wives to enjoy these caresses. Socrates and the others who had remained went with Callias for a morning walk with Lycon and his son. Thus ended this banquet.<sup>28</sup>

*The power of beauty as the foundation of historical human community*

The interpretation of beauty in its dominant character has established that this concept is ontological and existential. Here, beauty is by no means the product of a subjective will to create, but rather the consequence of a transcendental power (which makes experience possible) of the original. Therefore, there is no separation between beauty and existence: the latter is determined

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28. *Ibid.*, IX, 2 ff. [Spanish translation cited, pp. 355–356].

by it, one must allow oneself to be guided by the power of beauty and submit to it.

Is such an important thesis sufficiently substantiated by the interpretation of a single passage from Xenophon? Isn't this basis too meagre? To further substantiate the metaphysical scope of this theory of beauty (which is also urgent because Xenophon is not usually attributed philosophical relevance), let us study another passage from *The Banquet*. Surprisingly, Xenophon states here that beauty and its power (the erotic) are the only foundation of human community, in its social, political and historical aspects.

### *The text*

As one of the many speakers at the banquet, Critobulus talks about his own beauty. The same age as Clinias, a cousin of Alcibiades, he admires him passionately. Throughout the conversation, each speaks of his own qualities and talents, so Critobulus praises his own beauty and explains why it means so much to him. This speech bears a striking parallel to Phaedrus' speech in Plato's *Symposium* (178a ff.), which extols Eros as the creator of the greatest goods. Through the power of beauty, says the Platonic text, Eros is capable (among other things) of leading young people to devotion and sacrifice:

So, if there were any possibility of a city or an army of lovers and beloved ones, there would be no better way for them to administer their own homeland than by abstaining from all that is ugly and emulating one another. And if men like these fought side by side, they would conquer, even if they were few in number, so to speak, the whole world. [...] On the other hand, only lovers are determined to die for another, not only men, but also women.<sup>29</sup>

Xenophon also emphasises this aspect of beauty, and now we must interpret Plato's (seemingly paradoxical) thesis in line with Xenophon's text:

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29. Plato, *Symposium*, 178 e - 179 b [Spanish translation by M. Martínez Hernández in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. III, Madrid, Gredos, 1986, pp. 200-201].

[1] Crito said at that moment: 'I must then say for my part *the reasons why I am proud of my beauty*'.

"Say it," they replied. "Well, if I am not as beautiful as I believe myself to be, you should rightly be punished for deceit, for without anyone forcing you to do so, you continually affirm under oath that I am beautiful. [2] I believe you, because I consider you to be good men. But if I really am beautiful, and you feel the same way about me as I feel about the one I think is beautiful, I swear by all the gods (a) *that I would not trade my beauty for the empire of the Great King*. (b) For I now enjoy looking at Clinias more than all the other beauties in the world. *I would rather be blind to everything else than to Clinias, even if he were only one*. I am even annoyed with the night and with sleep because I cannot see him, but I am very grateful to the day and to the sun because they allow me to see Clinias. (c) There is also another reason why we should be proud of being beautiful, and that is that if the strong man has to obtain his goods by his *efforts*, and the brave man by facing *danger*, or the wise man at least *by speaking*, the *beautiful man*, on the other hand, could obtain everything even without doing anything. [3] For example, even though I know that riches are a sweet possession, (a) I would feel more pleasure in giving Clinias what I have than in receiving the same from someone else, (b) and I would be happier *as a slave* than as a free man if Clinias were willing to be my master. (c) Because it would be easier for me *to work* with him than to be at rest, (d) and I would rather *risk myself* for him than live without danger. Therefore, Callias, if you are proud of being able to make men more just, I am even more so in *leading them to all kinds of virtue, for by some inspiration we instil in our lovers, we make them more generous with money, more fond of effort and more eager for glory in danger, and even more modest and discreet*, since they even blush for what they need most. It is madness *not to choose the beautiful as generals*. I, for example, would even walk through fire with Clinias, and I am sure that you would too, if you were with me. So, Socrates, stop doubting *whether my beauty can be of any benefit to men*. [4] *Nor should beauty be discredited by saying that it soon passes*, for just as a child is beautiful, so too is a young man, a man, and an old man. The proof of this is that beautiful old men are chosen as bearers of bouquets to Athena, on the idea that beauty is present at all ages. [5] And if it is pleasant *to get what one desires from people willingly*, I am sure that right now, without saying a word, I would sooner convince this boy and this girl to kiss me than you, Socrates.

even if you used your eloquence to the fullest." [...] [6] To which he replied: "Are you not going to stop reminding me of Clinias?"

"And even if I don't mention him by name, do you think I will remember him any less? (a) Don't you know that I have such a clear image of him in my soul that (b) if I had to sculpt or paint him, I would reproduce his figure no less faithfully than if I were looking at him myself?" And Socrates replied: (c) "In that case, why, if you have such a similar image, do you bother me by taking me where you can see him?" "Because, Socrates, seeing him gives me pleasure, while seeing the image gives me no pleasure and engenders longing."<sup>30</sup>

### *Text structure*

The theme of the text is, obviously, the power of beauty, but now in relation to the various abilities (*αἰσθηταί*, virtues of human beings) that it is capable of producing. Some motifs that we already know from previous research reappear here. The text can be divided into six parts.

The first part [1] introduces the general theme: pride in one's own beauty, which Clinias' praise of beauty must justify. The second part [2] presents the various arguments: (a) Critobulus would not trade his beauty for anything; for him, it is something primary, decisive, and determining; (b) beauty is the most valuable thing for him, as it opens his eyes to the object of his eros ("I would rather be blind to everything else than to Clinias, even if he were only one"). Here we see once again the close relationship between beauty and eros: Clinias' beauty is the object of Critobulus' desire, it opens his eyes, and the aforementioned parallelism between beauty, light and day is maintained ("I am even annoyed with the night and with sleep because I cannot see him, but I am very grateful to the day and the sun because they allow me to see Clinias"). (c) Beauty influences by itself; without effort, without work, it awakens the good qualities of human beings.

### *Direct effect of beauty*

Strength, courage and wisdom are human abilities: we have to acquire them through effort, work or discourse.

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30. Xenophon, *Symposium*, IV, 10 ff. [Spanish translation cited, pp. 324-326, 327].

sensible discourse. As Aristotle would later say, through the repetition of certain actions, the corresponding attitude can be achieved. Thus, the human world is not present from the beginning, but arises through a specific process that we call 'history'.

Among the varied properties of human beings, beauty occupies a unique place: it achieves its goal effortlessly, directly. It is the basis of all endeavours and justifies them. Beauty and eros appear here for the first time as the sole basis of human history.

Plato also alludes to this mysterious nature of beauty and its direct effect in *Phaedrus*. Riding on the edge of the world, souls contemplate eternal, ahistorical values; one of these is beauty (not truth), which, when contemplated, leaves behind the sting, the impulse (*eros*) towards the supernatural world; eros incites human beings to build their world.

Sight is, in fact, the finest of the sensations that reach us through the body; *but with it we cannot see the mind* – because it would cause us terrible loves, if its image had the same clarity that it has, and thus reached our sight – and the same would happen with everything that is worthy of love. But *only beauty* has been given the most dazzling and lovable nature. [...] And not knowing where to go, [the soul] becomes enraged, and, thus enraged, it cannot sleep at night or rest during the day, and it runs eagerly to where it thinks it will see the one who carries beauty with them.<sup>31</sup>

### *Beauty and its power (eros) as the source of human abilities*

Thus, beauty has a primary function, since impulse, aspiration, is the root of the construction of our world. This idea, which was already implicitly contained in the last section of the second part of Critobulus' speech, is developed in the third part [3], and therefore requires detailed study. This part lists the abilities that beauty provokes. (a) The virtues that follow the erotic influence are:

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31. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 250 d, 251 d [English translation by Richard P. Gill in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. III, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 354, 357].

*generosity* ("I would feel more pleasure giving Clinias what I have than receiving the same from someone else"), (b) *submission* ("I would be more comfortable as a slave than as a free man"), (c) *love of work* ("it would be easier for me *to work* with him than to be at rest"), (d) *courage* ("I would rather risk myself for him than live without danger"). It is interesting that in the text the effect of beauty (eros) is actualised in various ways, that is, the text shows it in an example and always refers to Clinias. Then it presents the same theme in an abstract way: "Therefore, Callias, if you are proud of being able to make men more just, I [the beautiful] am even more so than you in leading them to all kinds of virtue [skill], for by some inspiration we instil in our lovers, we make them more liberal with money, more fond of effort, and more eager for glory in danger."

From this, the profound meaning of Phaedrus' praise of Eros in Plato's *Symposium* becomes clear. Eros is praised there as the origin of all human abilities, even as the only true foundation of the army and the state, which sounds (to put it mildly) a little strange to us. Plato draws on the same arguments found in Xenophon, who has Critobulus proclaim the almost paradoxical demand that only beautiful men should be appointed generals. Therefore, here too we have the metaphysical, ontological meaning of beauty in its erotic effect.

#### *Art and artists*

The fourth part [4] emphasises that the advantages of beauty are not limited to the ephemeral beauty of youth, but extend to all ages; proof that the erotic effects of beauty *are not limited to the sensory realm*: 'for just as a child is beautiful, so too is a young man, a man and an old man'.

The fifth part [5] insists once again that the effect of beauty is direct: all the desires of the beautiful are willingly fulfilled, its effect is "natural".

The sixth (and last) part [6] contains the first important reference for us to art and works of art. Beauty causes eros and opens the eyes, the sight: hence the lover carries *within himself* the image (σιδoς) of the beloved ("do you not know that I have in my

soul such a clear image of him...'). This fact of *carrying an image within oneself* has a double meaning: on the one hand, that impulse (both sensory and spiritual) is the experience of a restlessness that must be clarified, for it contains within itself the original stimulus to which we are destined. But carrying an image within oneself is at the same time an aspect of the definition of the artist, who, comparing this inner image with the outer figure, has to find the resemblance in his own works: ("... if I were to sculpt or paint it, I would reproduce its figure no less faithfully than if I were looking at it myself"). *Similarity* is established as the goal of art, and an inner image (which will be of decisive importance for the later definition of art) or an outer image can be indicated as the object of art. But the important thing is that both the inner image and the outer image become visible through the eros that beauty awakens.

This statement is followed by an essential restriction in relation to connection with the power and nature of works of art: a work of art is a copy, and therefore much weaker and more unreal than the original, which brings us joy and pleasure, while the copy only causes us longing. Thus, art is understood here as a pale reality that already has that character of shadow and unreality that Plato will describe in more detail. When asked by Socrates why Critobulus wants to be with Clinias and would never abandon him, even though he has declared that thanks to eros he carries an inner image of his figure, Critobulus replies: "Because, Socrates, the sight of him gives me pleasure, while the image gives me no pleasure and engenders longing."

Plato will think much more deeply than Xenophon about the relationship between beauty, eros, inner image and outer image. And he will show how eros, *by opening our eyes, reveals its own character as an image*, so that the outer image is only a shadow of the inner image, that is, of the original inner reality.

### *The broad ontological meaning of beauty*

This second interpretation makes it clearer how the problem of beauty takes on an ontological meaning in Xenophon. In this context, it is worth quoting another passage that

the fear of the sensory effect of beauty (in its existential sense). In the *Memoirs of Socrates*, we read:

"And does that surprise you?" said Socrates. "Don't you know that tarantulas, which are no bigger than half an obol, can reduce people to dust with their pain and take away their senses just by touching them with their mouths?"

"Yes, by Zeus," said Xenophon, "because the tarantula injects something with its bite."

And do you believe, you fool, that beautiful boys do not infect you when they kiss, even if you do not see it? Don't you know that this little beast they call beautiful and attractive is even more terrible than tarantulas, because the latter make contact, while the former, without even touching, infects anyone who looks at it, even from afar, with something that drives them mad? (Perhaps that is why lovers are called archers, because beautiful boys hurt even from a distance). Therefore, I advise you, Xenophon, that whenever you see a beautiful boy, you flee precipitously. And to you, Critobulus, I advise you to go abroad for a year, because perhaps during that time you will be able to heal yourself from the bite.

Thus, with regard to carnal pleasures, he believed that those who did not feel secure in the face of them should indulge in circumstances in which, without the body needing them at all, the soul would not accept them, or, if the body needed them, they would not pose any problems. As for himself, he was evidently so well prepared that he abstained more easily from the most beautiful and attractive young men than others did from the ugliest and most unfortunate.<sup>32</sup>

Something decisive can be gleaned from these phrases. Regardless of what Xenophon understands by the concept of beauty (it is still not entirely clear), it is already undeniable that beauty is an overwhelming power that takes hold of us, transcending all subjectivity, and is therefore something *objective* that stimulates us and engages us in eros. Through *sensory impulse*, we seek *in the other* what completes us. Plato alludes to the biological meaning of sensory complementarity, which at this level of life allows us to participate in eternity through reproduction; on the contrary, *spiritual eros* drives us to a consu-

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32. Xenophon, *Memoirs of Socrates*, I, 3, 12 [Spanish translation by Juan Zaragoza in: Xenophon, *Memoirs of Socrates. Economic. Banquet. Apology of Socrates*, Madrid, Gredos, 1993, pp. 44-45].

spiritual formation, to complete our self in the other by establishing a *human world*, that is, history. Thus, beauty *cannot be attributed here with an aesthetic meaning*, as it encompasses all human existence.

### **3. The beauty of nature and the beauty of human works. The problem of art in Xenophon**

#### *The sensory budget of beauty*

Continuing our investigation, we must examine how beauty manifests itself according to Xenophon: first, *through the senses*, which Xenophon describes as open passages (in line with fragment 84 of Empedocles, which we quoted when discussing the function of the eyes); what we perceive through these channels are colours, figures, expressions of power, possession, symbols of order and power. Xenophon distinguishes (a) perception through one sense; (b) perception through the whole body; (c) perception through the soul. This aesthetic theory of perception (in Greek αἰσθησις = perception) deals with the sensory basis of beauty. In *Hiero* we read:

I believe I have observed, O Hiero, that individuals enjoy and suffer through images with their eyes, sounds with their ears, food and drink with their mouths, and, as for amorous pleasures, through the organs we all know. With regard to cold and heat, hard and soft, light and heavy, I believe that we also consider that we enjoy and suffer from them with our whole body. Of good and evil, sometimes we believe we enjoy them with the soul alone, other times, on the contrary, we suffer, and still other times, we enjoy and suffer with both the soul and the body together. I think we realise that we enjoy sleep, but how, with what and when, I believe we are rather ignorant of that, he said. And perhaps this is not surprising, since sensations are clearer to us when we are awake than when we are asleep.<sup>33</sup>

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33. Xenophon, *Hiero*, I, 4 ff. [Spanish translation by Orlando Guntiñas Tuñón in: Xenophon, *Minor Works*, and Pseudo-Xenophon, *The Republic of the Athenians*, Madrid, Gredos, 1984, pp. 23–24].

*Beauty as a property of things*

The most varied things can be considered 'beautiful': jewels, treasures, clothes, houses, villages, cities, landscapes, mountains, gardens, human actions, human figures. It is useful to read several texts to get an idea of Xenophon's peculiar (somewhat oriental) taste and his fascination with beauty.

For example, Xenophon talks about how Cyrus and Astyages groom themselves:

We believe we have been informed that Cyrus considered it necessary for rulers to distinguish themselves from their subjects not only by their superiority over them, but also believed that they should be deceived by dramatic gestures. Thus, he chose to wear the Median tunic and convinced his collaborators to wear it as well. He felt that this garment concealed any physical defects and highlighted the good looks and stature of those who wore it, as it had a type of footwear that made it completely unnoticeable that soles had been added, making them appear taller than they were. He also approved of painted eyes to make them appear more beautiful than they were, and make-up to make their skin tone appear more beautiful than it naturally was. He also ensured that they did not [...] avert their gaze from anything, like men who are not surprised by anything. He believed that all these measures contributed to them appearing to their subjects as men who were not to be despised.<sup>34</sup>

We can compile the passages in which Xenophon speaks of beautiful shawls, cups and jewels (*Cyropaedia*, V, 2, 7; V, 5, 39; VIII, 2, 8). In *The Oeconomicus*, he speaks of the beauty of gardens, 'paradises where the king spends his time' and which must be 'adorned in the most beautiful way possible with trees and all the other beauties that the earth produces'.<sup>35</sup>

*What human beings create can be beautiful, just like nature.* The *Symposium* says: 'Do you think that beauty is found only in man, or also in other things?' 'I believe, by Zeus, that it also exists in a horse, in a bull, and in many

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34. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, VIII, I, 40 [Spanish translation cited, p. 436].

35. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, IV, 13 ff. [Spanish translation by Juan Zaragoza in: Xenophon, *Memoirs of Socrates. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apology of Socrates*, Madrid, Gredos, 1993, p. 230].

inanimate objects. I know, for example, that a shield, a sword and a spear can also be beautiful."<sup>36</sup>

Xenophon emphasises natural beauty, for example, in his famous descriptions of horses; as is well known, Xenophon wrote a short work on horses, as well as on hunting.

"And the horse that prances causes such admiration that it attracts the gaze of all who see it, young and old alike. Indeed, no one can tear themselves away from watching it, at least while it is performing so brilliantly."<sup>(37)</sup>

### *Beauty, grandeur, figure, order*

Xenophon often uses the concepts μῆσιςθος ('greatness') and σσημα ('figure') as standards of beauty, for example, the beauty of a woman as the most beautiful in Asia (*Cyropaedia*, V, I, 4 ff.). In the story of Hercules at the crossroads, sensory pleasure appears in the form of a beautiful woman (*Memoirs of Socrates*, II, 1, 22; both texts by Xenophon can be read at the end of this volume).

The qualitative concept ἰαλόζ ('beautiful') is often accompanied by quantitative concepts. The analogy between greatness and beauty is shown in a word such as μσιαλοηρηση»ζ ('suitable for a great man', 'noble'). Almost all things that are described as beautiful are also considered great. Another property of beauty is *order*. This refers to created order, and the term τά3τηζ is used: the army, placed in battle order, is an excellent sight, both for its general and for spectators; and the cavalry rides with the greatest beauty when it executes its movements in order. A garden is also beautiful if the trees are well placed (*Economic*, IV, 21).

I would like to quote another passage from *the Economic*: 'Once I had the opportunity to board a large Phoenician merchant ship, Socrates, and I believe I had never seen such perfectly *arranged* rigging. I could see, in fact, an enormous amount

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36. Xenophon, *Symposium*, V, 3 [Spanish translation cited, p. 339].

37. Xenophon, *On Horsemanship*, XI, 9 [English translation by Michael A. Hogg in: Xenophon, *The Anabasis*, and Pseudo-Xenophon, *The Republic of the Athenians*, London, Grollye, 1964, p. 226].

of material distributed across a tiny continent."<sup>(38)</sup> In the same text, Xenophon, after praising the orderliness of a house, concludes that everything that is *orderly* is beautiful, regardless of the beauty of each individual object: "How beautiful it is to see shoes placed side by side, whatever their quality, [...] how beautiful even what would make not the serious man laugh, but the witty one: that even the pots (as they say) placed in good order give a sense of harmony! Everything else in general gains in beauty if it is put in order."<sup>(39)</sup>

There is also talk of the order of the choir. The concept of order is part of beauty here insofar as everything is in its place *as it should be*: this definition also points, albeit from another direction, to the ontological meaning of beauty. Order is not something formal, but rather means that the hierarchy, relationships and articulations that make the configuration visible are manifested as an element of the essence of beauty. Order becomes essential.

#### *The beauty of human works*

*We have thus arrived at the real problem.* Beauty is found at all levels of nature, for nature is governed by that legality, that proportion, that order and that measure that correspond to being in its manifestation in the various entities. And what about the beauty of human works and actions? We must bear in mind that for Xenophon, not only real things and bodies are beautiful, but also the actions, behaviours, states and works of human beings.

When can we consider all this to be beautiful?

Here, the problem of beauty leads to the field of anthropology. When asked whether everything beautiful is beautiful in itself or *in relation to something else* (it remains to be clarified in relation to what), Jenofonte replies: objects, possessions, colours, foreign and noble materials, etc., are beautiful *not only in relation to the order of nature* (as we have seen so far), *but also in relation to what human beings do with them, in relation to...*

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38. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, VIII, 11 [Spanish translation cited, p. 247].

39. *Ibid.*, VIII, 19-20 [Spanish translation cited, p. 249].

*with their own goals.* If objects, colours, and materials do not contribute to the fulfilment and affirmation of the human being, they are misused, and *the objects themselves become ugly.* The crux of the matter *shifts to the field of the application of objects in the sense of human fulfilment:*

- Do you call a body, a piece of furniture, or anything else that you know is beautiful for everyone beautiful?
- By Zeus! I certainly do not.
- So, according to the purpose for which each thing is useful, is its use beautiful for this purpose?
- Yes, certainly.
- According to that, is there anything beautiful about an end other than that whose use is beautiful?
- Not in any other sense.
- Then, is a useful thing beautiful in relation to what it is useful for?
- I believe so.<sup>40</sup>

Also in a passage already quoted from *The Banquet*, in which he asks whether beauty is found only in human beings or also in other things, to which he replies that a horse, a shield or a sword can also be beautiful, there follows a decisive question and answer: "And how is it possible," he asked, "that these things, which are not at all alike, nevertheless be beautiful?" "By Zeus!" said Critobulus, "these things are also beautiful *if they are well made for the activities for which we acquire each one* or well endowed by nature for our needs."<sup>41</sup>

This concept of beauty "in relation to" also applies in the *spiritual realm*.

Antiphon, among us it is considered that both beauty and wisdom can be treated in a praiseworthy or despicable manner. If one sells their beauty for money to whoever desires it, that is called prostitution, but if someone meets a lover who is a man of good character and becomes their friend, then we consider that to be judicious and moderate. The same is true of wisdom: those who sell it for money to anyone who desires it are called sophists (as if we were to say 'bastards'); on the other hand, if someone recognises that a person is of good character, teaches them everything good they know and the

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40. Xenophon, *Memories of Socrates*, IV, 6, 8–10 [Spanish translation cited, pp. 190–191].

41. Xenophon, *Symposium*, V, 3–4 [Spanish translation cited, p. 339].

becomes a good friend, then we say that he does what befits a good man.<sup>42</sup>

The connection between beauty and utility should not be interpreted and misunderstood in the modern sense. For the Greeks, utility is that which *is produced in the service of the realisation, consummation and unfolding of the human being*. Thus, it is a question of usefulness and applicability in the higher sense that contributes to finding the human essence, not the profit referred to in today's thinking, which tends to be economic. This immediate and pragmatic usefulness is, for the Greeks, usefulness.

"Technique" is very dangerous because, as a pure means, *it does not yet contain within itself its ultimate human determination, and so it can be applied in many ways*. The usefulness of which Xenophon speaks is determined by how, where, and when human beings apply it *in relation to their own fulfilment* or, as they say in Greek, in relation to their own *praxis*. The concept of usefulness contains the concept of the human goal: for the Greeks, the true goal was the 'end'; *praxis* in the Greek sense is not only a means, but has its own meaning within itself, and the 'practical' goal was understood as fulfilment.

The idea we have presented in the context of defining the concept of 'natural beauty' is continued here, but in a new way: human beings are distinguished from all other natural levels of reality in that they must *seek* their own order, the only one that corresponds to them, their own legality and measure; therefore, they are obliged to transform and shape reality. This life in harmony with human nature is the production of an order as 'natural' as that which already prevails in pre-human levels: hence the continuity of a single concept of beauty as the manifestation of form, measure, proportion, order and legality through which the 'natural' is preserved.

#### *The problem of kalokagathía*

These ideas led Xenophon to the problem of *kaloka-gathía* (perfection as the harmony of beauty and goodness).

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42. Xenophon, *Memories of Socrates*, I, 6, 13 [Spanish translation cited, pp. 55-56].

If beauty is the manifestation of perfection in human endeavour, if achieving the goal (the consummation of the human being) coincides with goodness, then beauty and goodness must coincide. However, Xenophon is aware that this identity does not always occur, nor does it occur directly. In *The Oeconomicus*, we read:

It took me very little time to visit the good carpenters, the good blacksmiths, the good painters, the good sculptors and others of their kind, and to contemplate their works, which are considered beautiful. But my soul was very eager to meet some of those who bear the venerable name of 'good men' to find out what they did to deserve such a designation. And at first, since the epithet 'beautiful' is added to 'good', as soon as I saw someone beautiful, I approached them and tried to discover whether 'goodness' accompanied 'beauty'. But, naturally, this was not the case, and I seemed to notice that some who were entirely beautiful in appearance were evil in spirit. So, leaving aside beautiful appearance, I decided to approach one of the so-called good men.

*The separation of beauty and goodness* occurs in people whose purely biological functions, driven by desire, deviate from the work of human beings, from the attitude they should adopt towards their impulses. The concept of *kalokagathía* necessarily contains the problem of the separation of sensory life from spiritual life. Why does the sensory beautiful not always coincide with the good for human beings? Why is what is pleasant and beautiful to the senses not at the same time good in the ethical sense? The Socratic ideal of the unity of body and soul is sought, according to which the body must not only be in harmony with the soul, but must also be its reflection (*Memories of Socrates*, III, 10, 4-5). Socrates speaks of *δταφαίνστυ*, that is, that good and kind qualities are reflected in the body.

#### *Art as mimesis*

We have reached the final point in our interpretation of Xenophon. This author is probably the first of the pre-

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43. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, VI, 13 [Spanish translation cited, p. 237].

Platonists to expound the theory of art as mimesis, as "representation" of that beauty that is either taken directly from *nature* (from its order and proportions) or found in human works that, through the configuration of spiritual works, sensorially expose the *higher nature*. We must bear in mind that passage from Xenophon's *Symposium* which states that representations (in the sense of mimesis) are always weaker than reality itself, they are something like a shadow of the original beauty. Therefore, art must be understood as a *partial problem of beauty*, whereas in the modern conception, the problem of beauty concerns above all art, which encompasses all aesthetic possibilities and does not go beyond art.

Xenophon clearly describes the task of the artist or the art-healer: poetry is responsible for extolling heroes and gods; painting, for adorning rooms by depicting women and men. Sculptors adorn altars and temples; music is for dancing. The purpose of art is to perfectly represent beauty in an ontological sense. The *practice* of art and artists is subject to three main requirements: talent, teaching and practice: "Can one make others diligent while being indolent oneself?" "No, by Zeus!" replied Iscomachus, "just as a person who does not know music cannot teach music to others".<sup>44</sup> Without practice and teaching, even the greatest talent is wasted: "I also see that in all other respects, men differ greatly from one another in their *nature*, but that they progress greatly with *practice*."<sup>(45)</sup>

Following the example of *painting*, art is defined as *mimesis* or imitation of visible beauty or spiritual beauty. We quote two fundamental passages that need no comment:

–Tell me, Parrasio, is painting not a *representation* of objects that can be seen (σίλασία τῶν ὁραμένων)? For example, you imitate (μιμνήσκῃς), representing it through colours, depth and relief, darkness and shadows, hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, youth and decrepitude.

"You are right," he said.

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44. *Ibid.*, XII, 18 [Spanish translation cited, p. 264].

45. Xenophon, *Memories of Socrates*, III, 9, 3 [Spanish translation cited, p. 133].

'And undoubtedly, if you want to represent perfectly *beautiful* forms, given that it is not easy to find a single man whose limbs are all flawless, *you gather from different models* what each one has that is most beautiful, and thus you achieve a whole that appears completely beautiful.

"That is what we do," he said.

–And what about the most seductive, most pleasant, most amiable, most longed-for and most desired thing: *the character of the soul?*

*Do you imitate* that too? Or is it not representable?

–How could it be representable, he said, when it has no specific proportions, no colour, none of the properties you just mentioned, in short, when it is not visible?

–And is it not natural for man to show love and hatred on his face?

"I think so," he said.

"And can't that be imitated in the gaze?"

"Of course."

–And do you think that those who care about their friends' joys and misfortunes make the same faces as those who do not care?

–Of course not, by Zeus! [...]

–But arrogance and independence, humility and servility, temperance and intelligence, insolence and rudeness are also evident in the countenance and attitudes of men, whether they are standing still or moving.

–What you say is true.

–And isn't all that imitable?

–I certainly think so, he said.

"And what do you think is more pleasant to see, men who display beautiful, kind and amiable characters, or those who allow themselves to be seen as ugly, evil and hateful?"

–By Zeus, there is a great difference, Socrates. <sup>46</sup>

Three things can be gleaned from this text: 1) art is imitation; 2) art is imitation of both sensory and spiritual objects; 3) the imitation of beautiful spiritual traits is *more pleasing and beautiful*, as these traits reveal the perfection of human beings, the *praxis* that corresponds to them. Since Xenophon, alongside and above the imitation of reality, there has been a tendency to present an ideal that captures and reproduces various properties.

On another occasion, he visited the workshop of the sculptor Cliton and, talking to him, said:

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46. *Ibid.*, III, 10, 1-6 [Spanish translation cited, pp. 136-138].

"I see and know that the runners, athletes, boxers and wrestlers you make are beautiful, Cliton [...]. And does not the representation of the feelings (τὰ νάθη ανοιμῖσθα) of bodies engaged in some activity also produce a certain delight in the spectators?

–That is logical.

–In that case, should we not depict the eyes of the combatants as threatening and the gaze of the victors as joyful?

–Necessarily.

–Then the sculptor must *represent the activities of the soul* (τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἕρμια τὸ σιδστ νροστ1ά3stv) *with the figure*.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, aesthetic values (products of human creation) are not taken into consideration here; beauty manifests a higher order, such as that already shown by the works of nature, and which human beings reach in a new way *when they use being in relation to human goals and give passions a configuration that is in keeping with the stature of human beings*. The phenomenon of beauty therefore engages human beings, and through eros is the origin of all true human vocation, which must also be reflected in works of art.

#### 4. Current considerations

##### *The aesthetic attitude*

We must return to the issue we raised at the beginning. Our intention was: (1) to clarify theoretically the concept of beauty in Antiquity; (2) to answer the question of whether clarifying the ancient concept of beauty can help us understand some problems in contemporary art.

We have attempted to show that in the Pythagoreans and in Xenophanes (the most important witnesses to pre-Platonic thought), the theory of beauty has no aesthetic meaning, but is exclusively ontological. This position becomes clearer when viewed from its opposite: in the Modern Age (from Italian Humanism and the Renaissance onwards), beauty moved entirely into the realm of art, and art was understood as the product of a spiritual activity.

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47. *Ibid.*, III, 10, 6 [Spanish translation cited, pp. 138–139].

tual, as a creation of *the individual*. From this, the following theses can be deduced: nature is neither beautiful nor ugly in itself, but appears as 'beautiful' through the spiritual mediation carried out by an artist. Beauty becomes the goal of art as a result of an individual confrontation with nature, in which the artist extracts *possible* meanings from reality. Art and beauty are continuous discoveries of new aspects of reality that enter our field of vision through the artist's work (remember Bauch's words quoted above). We observe nature with eyes that have been trained by those works of painting that have determined the development of Western art.

Finally, from the aesthetic conception of beauty (as opposed to the ontological conception of Antiquity), it follows that works in which beauty manifests itself are not considered as *something that compromises human beings*, as a reality in itself, but only as *a possible interpretation of reality*. When faced with beauty, as the result of artistic activity, we are always 'spectators'; the work is a spectacle *before us*. What is offered for our contemplation has its own legitimacy (in colours, sounds, proportions, etc.) that resembles what we also perceive in play, which is why art and play have often been linked during the Modern Age. The museum-like contemplation of works of art, which emerged in the Renaissance, also has its roots here.

#### *Museums as an expression of aesthetic attitude*

The institution of the "museum" seems obvious to modern human beings. We even tend to assume that a culture must necessarily create this institution when it reaches a certain level, and that awareness of cultural tradition also awakens the desire to gather its artistic testimonies and present them to as many people as possible. But the museum removes the work of art from the space and time to which it belongs. The work is contemplated outside the sphere for which it was intended. The way the public views the works does not include engagement, as their attitude is aesthetic. The works that we consider works of art today, but which were originally

They had a sacred meaning, arose without the need for a spectator, and could even be placed in inaccessible or invisible locations, as they were only used for worship, that is, for participation in a sacred reality that engages human beings.

As is well known, during Antiquity (in temples and sacred places: on the Acropolis in Athens, in Delphi, in Olympia, as well as in the East and Egypt), numerous works of art, utensils and valuable amphorae were collected and preserved in special buildings called *thesaurói*. These collections, often cited in the history of museums, have nothing to do with our concept of a museum, as the works accumulated there were not preserved for historical and aesthetic reasons, but quite the opposite: they were preserved out of a desire to remove them from the flow of history, from temporality and from the profane world. For this reason, these treasures were not to be accessible to just anyone.

Certain collections from the Hellenistic period, such as that of the Attalids in Pergamon, which were renowned for being owned by experts, began to approach the modern concept of a museum. In Alexandria, a building was erected which, as it was dedicated to the muses, was given the name *muséion*. In Rome, it was proposed for the first time that works of art should be accessible to all and even declared a common good. In any case, the accumulation of works of art in Rome was mainly due to the need for pomp and notoriety, but also partly to the love of art among private individuals.

The fact that Roman art collections were destroyed during the Middle Ages is not only (as the Enlightenment still assumed) a sign of barbarism, but rather the consequence of a completely different conception of what we call "works of art". At that time, works of art were an essential component of religious life. The representation of Jesus Christ or the Virgin Mary and the construction of a cathedral were not aesthetic tasks, but actions for the greater glory of God, religious worship. Although works from Antiquity were destroyed during the Middle Ages, this period was much closer than we are to the spirit of Antiquity, as it still saw in these works powerful gods that had to be fought and defeated. The works of Antiquity were not yet what they are today for us: purely 'aesthetic' creations, but elements of religious reality.

incarnations of ideals of beauty as binding manifestations of being.

Nor can the cave paintings of Lascaux, Fond de Gaune, Niaux and those of the deserts of Australia and Africa be understood as imitations of things or animals; and they are not attributed "verisimilitude," "representation," or "aesthetic beauty." They do not seek the properties that play a decisive role in judging works of art in the Modern Age. The oldest paintings did not refer to a subjective reality, but were at the service of the divine, the powers that be, and nature (understood as a closed whole). But in an inadequate process of abstraction, we distinguish aesthetic elements in these works, such as composition, colour harmony, line rhythms and measurements. What we have before us are not 'works of art', but images with a sacred function. If their authors had been told about creative activity and subjective imagination, and if they had been told that they were 'artistic personalities', they would not have understood or would have found it as inappropriate as if we were to express our admiration to a modern physicist for the beauty of a device he had built for a specific purpose and tell him that he is an 'artist'.

Most works of Asian "art" also correspond correspond to an ontological attitude and their intentions cannot be understood from an 'aesthetic' point of view. Malraux notes:

If Asia has only recently become acquainted with museums, under the influence and guidance of Europeans, it is because for Asians (and especially those in the Far East), artistic contemplation and museums were incompatible. In China, the enjoyment of works of art was linked to their possession (unless they were religious art) and, above all, to their isolation. Paintings were not exhibited, but rather displayed each time to an enthusiast in a state of grace [...]. Comparing paintings, an intellectual exercise, is the opposite of the abandonment that only Asian contemplation allows; in the eyes of Asia, the museum, if not a place of learning, can be nothing more than an absurd concert in which contradictory melodies follow one another and mix, without intermission and without end.<sup>48</sup>

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48. A. Malraux, *op. cit.*, p. 9 [French edition, pp. 12–13].

In modern times, a decisive step has been taken in changing the meaning of the concept of 'work of art'. Whereas at the beginning of the modern era works of art were still collected for secular purposes (to decorate castles, to elevate and improve life: the collections of the Medici, Sforza and Gonzaga families), this context has now also been abandoned.

A separate world emerges, which we call 'the realm of art'; works of art form a world of their own, autonomous, no longer contemplated as part of the life of the community, of history, etc., but according to laws known only to those initiated into art. An independent territory emerges, detached from reality, a realm of art with its own criteria and its own idealism, full of works from all times and countries, open to all and spread everywhere thanks to the technique of reproduction. What was once sacred becomes a purely 'artistic' work; the portrait, which was once the representation of a person, becomes an abstraction. The 'imaginary museum' establishes a new history, that of autonomous artistic and aesthetic values, forming new groups, comparing, analysing and relating things that are very distant in space and time, such as prehistoric art and the most recent creations of modernity. In this imaginary realm, art becomes an end in itself, aspiring to its own perfection. Here, for the first time, works from the most varied eras can be brought together, freed from the constraints of the norms and values of our own tradition. Painting and writing are no longer at the service of the higher powers of life, but at the service of art, and the 'imaginary museum' is a creation of our modern art, which has become independent.

### *The ontological conception of beauty in contemporary art*

Are there trends in contemporary art that once again attribute a metaphysical value to beauty, that see it as an expression of being, so that the artist's work and labour are elevated to a plane that engages the human being? Is our era still capable of manifesting a structure of being in the work of art and perceiving a beauty full of being? These questions only

can be briefly discussed here. Those who tend to answer in the affirmative are often unaware that their ideas bring them closer to the theory of beauty in Antiquity.

Where today the concept of beauty takes on ontological significance, the corresponding artistic work begins with a critique of aesthetic attitude. For example, Hans Arp recognises that modern art sought to extract the most varied aspects and interpretations from reality, that this effort required individual confrontation with reality and presented beauty as an experience of *subjective* creative activity. Human beings thus become the measure of all things, works become spectacles that do not commit us existentially and that move (according to Arp) in the realm of the unreal and arbitrary.

Human beings behave as if they had created the world and could play with it. As soon as they began their glorious development, they coined the phrase that human beings are the measure of all things. They quickly set to work and turned everything they could upside down. [...] With the measure of all things, themselves, they measured and took bold measures. They cut and castrated beauty. [...] Confusion, unrest, meaninglessness, madness and obsession dominated the world. Paintings and statues emerged of foetuses with two geometric heads, human bodies with yellow hippopotamus heads, hybrid beings shaped like fans and with trunks, toothed stomachs and crutches, pyramids with enormous feet and tearful human eyes, handfuls of earth with genitals, etc.<sup>49</sup>

Arp clearly states that he considers this development to be a consequence of *the subjectivism* of modern art:

What is the original image of beauty? [...] Is it the costume, the mask, the spectacle of the Renaissance? Is it the desire to escape the body of the Gothic? Is it the cube and the sphere? [...] *Human beings became childish demiurges, childish creators.* In their megalomania, they wanted to be God and recreate the world. [...] Every painter, every sculptor wanted to be an even more astonishing creator. Instead of anonymity and humility, celebrity and the work of art appeared.<sup>50</sup>

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49. Hans Arp, *On My Way: Poetry and Essays 1912–1947*, New York, 1948, p. 81.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 81–82.

Thus, subjectivity, relativity, and creativity in its aesthetic form have completely separated human beings from reality and led them to the unreal, the fantastic, the arbitrary. 'In the past, human beings knew where up was and where down was, what was eternal and what was ephemeral. Human beings were not yet upside down. Their houses had floors, walls, and roofs. The Renaissance transformed the roof into a crazy sky, the walls into labyrinths and the floor into a precipice. Human beings have lost their sense of reality.'<sup>(51)</sup>

Arp wants to escape this situation by moving away from aesthetic subjectivism and advancing towards *primal reality*. The mere allusion to the need for 'anonymity' shows the direction of his efforts. 'Art [...] must lead to reality'.<sup>52</sup> 'Beautiful' works should no longer arise according to aesthetic categories, but (as Arp says) should be objects. Arp quotes what Alexander Partens wrote about him in the *Dada* almanac:

*"It was no longer a question of improving, refining or specifying an aesthetic system. He wanted immediate and direct production, like a stone breaking away from a rock, like a bud bursting open, like an animal reproducing. [...] He wanted a new body among us that was self-sufficient, an object that could just as easily be perched on the corner of a table as nestled at the bottom of the garden."*<sup>53</sup> His work seeks to belong to nature and become part of it. "My reliefs and sculptures blend *naturally into nature*. However, when studied closely, it is clear that they have been formed by human hands."<sup>(54)</sup>

How is this reality achieved? How can we define it? Arp distinguishes three forms of reality: *objective* reality, which is reality in the usual sense of the word; *subjective* reality, which is the reality of thought, ideality; and *primal* reality, the true reality that human beings have lost. Arp

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51. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, p. 90 [‘For him, it was no longer a question of improving, refining or specifying an aesthetic system. He wanted immediate and direct production, like a stone falling from a rock, like a flower opening, like an animal reproducing. [...] He wanted a new body among us that was self-sufficient, an object whose place was as much lying on the corners of tables as nesting at the bottom of the garden.’].

54. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

designates, with an expression that is perhaps not very fortunate, *mystical reality*.<sup>55</sup>

What does Arp mean by *subjective reality*? Human beings make their environment available to themselves by grasping its laws and designing systems of order; only their actions give reality to things; reality is simply *their* reality; human beings live in a reality created 'arbitrarily' by themselves.

For Arp, *objective reality* is no less false and derivative than the figure that emerged as a consequence of the attempt to objectify subjective reality with the assertion that things "in themselves" are nothing more than that perceptible reality we have made available to ourselves. Art's imitation of this phenomenal world does not give rise to an objective reality.

And what is the *primal, mystical reality* that a work of art that does not imitate external phenomenal reality must reveal? Arp speaks of mythical times shrouded in legend, when all things were *one and whole*; 'beauty lived naked among human beings'. This beauty, which Arp calls 'mystical reality', participates essentially in the being of things (as the Greeks said); it is not something thought, made or desired. Mystical reality, which possesses original beauty, is a primordial entity that has been hidden by subjectivisation. The work, which is not imitative but revealing, true, truly real, possesses this "Original beauty." In conventional aesthetics, beauty is understood in the manner of art theory, as a quality produced by human beings; the original is no longer attained.

*I was moving further and further away from aesthetics. I wanted to find another order, another value for man in nature. He should no longer be the measure of all things, nor should everything be measured by him, but on the contrary, all things and man should be like nature.*<sup>56</sup>

*In 1915, Sophie Tauber and I created our first works based on the simplest forms in painting, embroidery and collage.*

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55. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 90 ["I was moving further and further away from aesthetics. I wanted to find another order, another value for man in nature. Man should no longer be the measure of all things or relate everything to his measure, but on the contrary, all things and man should be like nature."]

57. *Ibid.*, p. 86 ["In 1915 Sophie Tauber and I created the first works based on the simplest forms in painting, embroidery and *collage*"].

*These paintings are realities in themselves, without meaning or intellectual intention. We rejected anything that was a copy or description in order to allow the elementary and the spontaneous to react in complete freedom.*<sup>58</sup>

What is this elemental and spontaneous thing? It is primal nature, which manifests itself in human beings and through human beings. It is orders, articulations; it is a figure, *a natural creation*, produced by human beings as a new level of nature. *"We do not want to copy nature. We do not want to reproduce, we want to produce. We want to produce like a plant that produces fruit and not reproduce."*<sup>59</sup>

Just as in the Middle Ages, art, as a representation of a sacred reality, was free from the arbitrariness of individual creation, now (in the name of nature, of the profane) anonymity is demanded:

*Since there is not the slightest trace of abstraction in this art, we call it concrete art. Works of concrete art should no longer be signed by their authors. These paintings, sculptures, and objects should remain anonymous in nature's great studio, like clouds, mountains, and seas.*<sup>60</sup>

*I love nature, but not its substitutes. Naturalistic, illusionist art is a substitute for nature.*<sup>61</sup>

It is not a question of interpreting nature, nor of showing possible aspects of it, but rather of creating *like nature*.<sup>62</sup>

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58. *Ibid.*, p. 86-87 ["These paintings are realities in themselves, without meaning or cerebral intention. We rejected anything that was a copy or description in order to let the elemental and the spontaneous react in complete freedom"].

59. *Ibid.*, p. 98 ["We do not want to copy nature. We do not want to reproduce, we want to produce. We want to produce like a plant that produces fruit, not reproduce."].

60. *Ibid.*, p. 98 ["Since there is not the slightest trace of abstraction in this art, we call it 'concrete art'. Works of concrete art should not be signed by their authors. These paintings, these sculptures, these objects, should remain anonymous in the great workshop of nature, just like clouds, mountains, and seas."].

61. *Ibid.*, p. 94 ["I love nature, but not its substitutes. Naturalistic, illusionist art is a substitute for nature."].

62. See the formulations of Nicholas of Cusa, *De Beryllo*, VI, 7, and Dante, *Inferno*, X, 103-105.

The intentions of the English sculptor Henry Moore are along the same lines. He also emphasises that the artist should not create *according to nature*, but *as nature*, that is, in a truly creative way: 'My sculptures are moving further and further away from reproduction, they are less and less an external copy, they are becoming abstract, as some people would say'. This idea is accompanied by a new attitude towards the material, the demand to 'do justice' to the material. If 'nature itself' and beauty coincide, then every 'natural' substance that takes the form of a work of art will have its own beauty, which must be taken into account and done justice to. We have learned to appreciate the beauty of nature in a new way, and for a sculptor, the properties of a type of stone give rise to demands that are no less important than the figure he wants to communicate to the stone. The sculptor must examine whether the 'being stone' is appropriate to the content of the work he wants to create. Mondrian's 'new plastic' also seeks to depart from all subjective and aesthetic conditions. The timeless and immutable, which Mondrian equates with original beauty, is in his opinion beyond all particular forms. Therefore, the abstract or (as he prefers to say) the absolute nature of the configuration is necessary to arrive at the *primordial reality*: "Deep down, in what changes, lies the immutable, which is timeless and *reveals itself as pure creative beauty*. Only this beauty [...] is for us the living reality: it is universal beauty. To do so

Seeing in this way with evidence is the object of the New Plastic Arts.<sup>63</sup>

An abstract art that achieves what Mondrian calls 'universal beauty' uses very simple, elementary means. For Mondrian, these are the surface, intersecting horizontal and vertical lines, the three primary colours, and white, black and grey. With these means, Mondrian believes he can give visible form to the immutable structures of all reality: asymmetrical, labile interrelationships that present in many different ways the universal balance that is broken again and again and restored again and again. 'Art is only a means to achieve this eternal balance. We have to discover and find a concrete balance. Science, philosophy, all abstract creations...

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63. Piet Mondrian, *Natürliche und abstrakte Realität*, in: M. Seuphor, *Piet Mondrian*, Cologne, 1957, p. 328 [Spanish translation by Rafael Santos Torroella in: Piet Mondrian, *Realidad natural y realidad abstracta*, Madrid, Debate, 1989, p. 79].

tas (such as art) are means to achieve this balance."<sup>64</sup> This balance, which can only be achieved through abstract configuration, is a state of absolute peace in which all tensions have dissolved and *art merges with life*. "Art is only a 'substitute' as long as the beauty of life is flawed. Art will gradually disappear as life acquires 'balance'. [...] In the future, the realisation of purely plastic expression in tangible reality will replace artistic creation. We will no longer need paintings and sculptures, for we will live in realised art."<sup>65</sup>

These phrases are strikingly reminiscent of Rimbaud's thesis on the end of poetry as literature, which we quoted at the beginning. Mondrian's goal is the exposition of beauty in an ontological sense, and art is the transformation of reality into a primal state (*equilibrium*). Removing the concept of beauty from the realm of aesthetics and individual creation brings us closer to the ontological conception of beauty.

Naturally, one might object that ontological intention (assuming we accept it) does not apply to all contemporary art, just as one cannot deny a certain beauty in the works of Arp and Moore, while Mondrian's constructions based on straight lines and surfaces are bland and cold, which does not change when one learns about his ideas, so the theory does not help much in appreciating these works.

However, the reference to certain trends of our time is not intended to be valid for all contemporary art. Nevertheless, this aspect clearly indicates that certain works and trends of today cannot be done justice with traditional 'aesthetic' categories. These works do not seek to be interpretations, individual creative configurations of 'represented' nature, but rather primal forms, reality produced anew. If we identify the artistic with the *aesthetic*, we recall Hegel's warning about the death of art in the age of philosophy: 'The peculiar nature of artistic production and its works no longer satisfies our supreme need. [...] Thought and reflection have surpassed beautiful art. [...] Considered in its supreme determination, art is and remains for us, in all these respects, something of the past.'<sup>66</sup>

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64. P. Mondrian, *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art*, New York, 1951, p. 32.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Hegel, *Ästhetik*, X, I, 14-16 [Spanish translation by Alfredo Brotóns Muñoz in: Hegel, *Lecciones sobre la estética*, Madrid, Akal, 1989, pp. 13-14].



## II. THE CONDEMNATION OF ART. PLATO

### 1. The ontological meaning of beauty

#### *'Art beyond art'*

The art of the last fifty years has gone beyond the limits of the aesthetic realm. Its path has led it to reject the label of 'art' in the modern sense, giving rise to talk of 'art beyond art' (Sedlmayr) and the need to find another name for these works. On the one hand, this corresponds to the intentions of this movement; on the other hand, it expresses the criticism that this is not a change of style, but the end of art. This criticism presupposes the idea that art is an interpretation of reality through the meaning that the artist confers on it. On the contrary, the products of "Art beyond art" aims to *be*, among other things, "nature": "There are no longer landscapes, still lifes, or faces. What exists is the painting, the object, the painting-object, the object-painting, the useful, useless, beautiful object."<sup>1</sup>

In our Introduction, we have already mentioned a possible explanation for this trend: the total exploitation of human possibilities, certain final forms of modern art that derived from this, and a general weariness led to a reaction against all forms of the aesthetic, the non-binding, and a desire to return in some way to full reality. This trend overcomes the difference between objective and non-objective art, which is often used to distinguish contemporary art from modern art. Moreover, the desire to achieve being with the work gives rise to the

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1. Fernand Léger, 'Sehr aktuell sein', in: *Europa-Almanach*, 1925 [Spanish translation by José María Coco Ferraris in: Walter Hess, *Documentos para la comprensión del arte moderno*, Buenos Aires, Nueva Visión, 1973, p. 150].

the term "concrete" instead of "abstract", which a group of contemporary artists use for their non-figurative works.

Let us return to the theories about beauty at the beginning of Western history. It was the general ideas implicitly contained in the texts of the pre-Socratics that directed our attention to the intentions of contemporary artists, who are part of a completely different context. These sporadic pre-Platonic manifestations (from Homer, through Hesiod and the Pythagoreans, to the philosophy of Xenophon) acquire a clear form and a systematic theoretical foundation in Plato's rational thought.

First, there is the problem of beauty in figures, colours and sounds (*Philebus*, 51 c-d), that is, in the field of *sensory* beauty. "So, if someone claims that something is beautiful because it has an attractive colour or shape or anything of that sort [...]".<sup>2</sup> There is talk of the beauty of colours and the beauty of figures (*Gorgias*, 465 b; *Sophist*, 251 a; *Laws*, 669 a). Plato emphasises the sense of sight over the other sensory organs (*Republic*, 507 c - 508 d): in *Phaedrus* (250 c-d) he says that sight is the clearest and most acute of our sensory organs; and the greatest praise of the sense of sight is found in *Timaeus* (47 a-b). The concept of beauty always appears in Plato in relation to the visual aspect. In *Phaedrus*, it is said that those who see want to make offerings to the 'beautiful' (regardless of how it is embodied) as if it were a statue. When Eros is extolled as the most beautiful god, he appears in the splendour of his youth (*Symposium*, 196 a-b).

Plato closely links the visible (that which manifests itself to the senses) with the concept of limit and proportion, since only that which is limited can appear and be visible. In *Philebus* (55 e), he says that proportion leads from the realm of the good to the realm of the beautiful. In *Timaeus* (31 b; 32 c), he praises the beauty of the order of the world, which arises through proportion (*Laws*, II, 665 a).

*Beauty appears within limits; inner beauty and outer beauty.*

*Delimiting, putting limits on the unlimited, is the origin of all kinds of beautiful manifestations:*

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2. Plato, *Phaedo*, 100 c-d [Spanish translation by Carlos García Gual in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. III, Madrid, Gredos, 1986, p. 110].

-So, have the seasons and *all beautiful things* been born from this, from the mixture of the unlimited and *the limited*?

-How could it be otherwise?

-And I omit to mention many other things, such as beauty and strength with health, and in souls also many other very beautiful qualities.<sup>3</sup>

-The [lineage] of that which has *limited* form [...] is manifest to us.

-Which one and how do you say it?

-The one about equality and duality and everything that puts an end to the opposition of opposites, and which, by imposing a number on them, makes them proportional and concordant.<sup>4</sup>

Proportion and measure give rise to health, music, the order of the seasons, and all other beautiful things (*Philebus*, 26 b). Proportion, dominating the relationship between body and soul, causes the beauty of the whole human being and makes it the most *beautiful* and lovable *vision*, so that a body that, for example, has disproportionately long legs or suffers from some other type of erroneous measure will be ugly (*Timaeus*, 87 e). Plato distinguishes between the beauty of the body and the beauty of the soul, *external* beauty and *internal* beauty (*Phaedo*, 279 c; *Symposium*, 210 b): "So that we do not go on too long about all this, let us simply say that all postures and melodies that conform to the virtue of the soul or the body, whether of the soul itself or of an image, are beautiful, and those that depend on vice are the opposite."<sup>5</sup> The virtue of the body consists in cultivating its abilities to the utmost, to perfection: once its virtue is visible, its beauty shines forth; the same can be said of the virtues of the soul, which in the form of abilities manifest the essence of the human being through actions.

Oh dear Pan, and all the other gods who dwell here, grant me that I may become beautiful on the inside, and that everything I have on the outside may be linked in friendship with what is inside.<sup>6</sup>

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3. Plato, *Philebus*, 26 b [Spanish translation by María Ángeles Durán in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. VI, Madrid, Gredos, 1992, pp. 48-49].

4. *Ibid.*, 25 d-e [Spanish translation cited, p. 48].

5. Plato, *Laws*, II, 655 b [Spanish translation by Francisco Lisi in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. VIII, Madrid, Gredos, 1999, p. 248].

6. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 279 b-c [Spanish translation cited, p. 413].

In that case, it seems that excellence is something like health, beauty and good spirits, while evil is like illness, ugliness and weakness.<sup>7</sup>

*What causes beauty to manifest itself?* Eros, which is *the generative principle*, in relation to both physical and spiritual abilities.

Indeed, by being in contact [...] with beauty and relating to it, it gives birth to and procreates what it had long conceived.<sup>8</sup> [...] when one of these [...] wishes to procreate and engender, then it seeks [...] in its environment the beauty in which *it can engender*, for in ugliness they will never procreate.<sup>9</sup>

Love is directed towards beauty (*Charmides*, 167 e; *Symposium*, 206 e). The goal that love seeks in generating the body and spirit is immortality.

#### *Ontological meaning. Relationship with eros*

During the 19th century, people were convinced that beauty possessed autonomy, and that a special science should be dedicated to explaining its essence: *aesthetics*. If we apply this definition of aesthetics to Antiquity, it is erroneous, as it overlooks the ontological nature of beauty.

The dialectic of beauty, as developed in *Phaedrus* and *The Banquet*, is *ontological, not aesthetic*. Before beginning to live, each soul contemplated *the entity itself* in a supersensory place. Unlike justice and prudence, beauty already had a special radiance there. "But seeing the radiance of beauty was possible then."<sup>10</sup> (Let us recall here once again the corresponding passage from Xenophon that we quoted earlier.)

[...] as far as beauty is concerned, she shone among all those visions [...]. Sight is, in fact, for us, the finest of the sensations that reach us through the body;

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7. Plato, *Republic*, 444 e [Spanish translation by Conrado Eggers Lan in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. IV, Madrid, Gredos, 1986, p. 242].

8. Plato, *Symposium*, 209 c [Spanish translation cited, p. 259].

9. *Ibid.*, 209 b [Spanish translation cited, p. 259].

10. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 250 b [Spanish translation cited, p. 353].

but with it, *the mind cannot be seen* [...] and the same would happen with everything that is worthy of love. But *only beauty has been given the most dazzling and lovable nature*.<sup>11</sup>

The soul remembers that radiance when it contemplates particular beauties; and then it is at the mercy of rapture, of *obsession*. Rapture before a beautiful face and body leads to love and friendship; it consummates the passage from the sensory to the ethical, to a higher reality.

It is necessary [...] that anyone who wishes to follow the right path to this end should begin at a young age to turn towards beautiful bodies. And [...] first fall in love with *a single* body and engender beautiful thoughts in it; then understand that the beauty in any body is akin to that in another and that [...] it is great foolishness not to consider the beauty in all bodies to be one and the same. Once they have understood this, they must become lovers of all beautiful bodies and calm that strong infatuation with *just one*, despising it and considering it insignificant. Next, he must consider the beauty of souls to be more valuable than that of the body, [...] so that he is compelled [...] to contemplate the beauty that resides in the rules of conduct and in the laws [...]. After the rules of conduct, he must be led to the sciences, so that he may also see the beauty of these [...]. Indeed, whoever has been instructed in the things of love [...] will suddenly discover, having reached the end of their amorous initiation, something wonderfully beautiful by nature, namely, Socrates, that very thing for which all previous efforts were made.<sup>12</sup>

This relationship between Eros, beauty and being itself is not aesthetic in nature, but rather a progression through the *levels of being*, a metaphysical progression that leads from the apparent world to being itself.

According to the texts we have cited, nature's game of love belongs to the realm of beauty, but this goes beyond the world of the senses. Beauty possesses an exteriority that other levels of reality (such as truth) lack. For Plato, the *visible beauty of the body* is the *royal road to ideas*: this is the function of beauty in the whole of spiritual life. All the allusions of the pre-Socratics and Xenophon to the relationship between beauty and the soul are an expression of this.

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11. *Ibid.*, 250 d [Spanish translation cited, p. 354].

12. Plato, *Symposium*, 210 a - e [Spanish translation cited, pp. 261-263].

The relationship between beauty and visibility is exploited philosophically by Plato in an ontological sense. If beauty did not exist, we would not perceive the perfection, harmony and divinity of the world.

### *Beauty and its power*

The passage from Plato's *Symposium* that defines the essence of eros as the impulse towards beauty bears a certain resemblance to the phrases from Xenophon that we have interpreted above. Xenophon begins with beauty and shows how it acts and captivates human beings (he calls this *eros*). Plato does the opposite: he begins with the phenomenon of eros (understood as a fundamental human experience) and shows how it leads to the *primal being*, which in its splendour is defined as *beauty*. Before this passage, there is no mention of artistic beauty or the essence of the work of art.

Plato's *Symposium* is so well known that we need not quote the text verbatim. After Eros' various praises, Socrates takes the floor and emphasises that before praising him, we must define his essence and his works (*Symposium*, 199 c). Socrates makes two points: a) every impulse is an impulse *towards something*; 'is Eros such that he must be love of something (τινὸς ἕρω) or of nothing?'.<sup>13</sup> b) Every impulse is towards something we *do not have* and are lacking; 'this one too, and any other who feels desire, desires what is not at his disposal and is not present, *what he does not possess*, what he is not and what he is lacking'.<sup>14</sup> The Greek text says μὴ παρόντος, which should be translated as 'that which is not yet manifest, that which is not yet apparent'. This clarification is important, as it indicates an essential feature of eros. Those who desire something are not yet in clarity, in light, in the obvious, but are still moving in the undefined, in darkness. The erotic state is between being and non-being, it is a becoming that is still

"On the way" to the goal and the end.

For the Greeks, the goal of the impulse (as the end and limit that the impulse carries within itself) is an essential moment in the manifestation of reality: only that which appears within its corresponding limits has reached its end and, therefore, its consummation. Hence, every impulse aspires to reality.

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13. *Ibid.*, 199 c [Spanish translation cited, p. 240].

14. *Ibid.*, 200 e [Spanish translation cited, pp. 242-243].

This interpretation of Eros is confirmed when we encounter the term 'beauty':

"But haven't you agreed that he loves *what he lacks and does not possess?*"

–Yes, he said.

–Then Eros does not possess *beauty* and is lacking in it. <sup>15</sup>

Thus, becoming (that state between non-being and being) is a needy state, since it has not yet reached its end (which acts upon it); the end, being, which in its manifestation is identified here with beauty. Consequently, Eros is not a *god*, but a demon; the demonic consists in not having finished, in being on the way, in not having arrived yet:

–[...] Tell me, do you not claim that all gods are happy and beautiful? [...] And do you not call happy precisely those who possess good and *beautiful* things? [...] But in relation to Eros, at least you have acknowledged that, lacking good and beautiful things, he desires precisely what he lacks. [...] How then could he who does not share in beauty and goodness be a god? [...]

"What could it be, then, Eros?" I said. [...]

"A great demon, Socrates." <sup>16</sup>

### *Eros, impulse and procreation in beauty*

As Eros is 'in the middle' (μστᾱ3ύ) between being and non-being, as he is a demon, he is entrusted with the task of mediator: 'He interprets and communicates to the gods the things of men and to men the things of the gods, the supplications and sacrifices of both orders and the rewards for the sacrifices. Being in the middle of both, he fills the space between them, so that *the whole remains united with itself as a continuum.*'<sup>(17)</sup> Thus, not only Eros, but also *beauty* (from which Eros originates), has an *existential* and *metaphysical* meaning. Beauty is transferred to the realm of the divine, and Eros, by leading there, causes the primal being to manifest itself.

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15. *Ibid.*, 201 b [Spanish translation cited, p. 243].

16. *Ibid.*, 202 c - d [Spanish translation cited, p. 246].

17. *Ibid.*, 202 e [Spanish translation cited, p. 259].

The impulse towards something and its goal (eros and beauty) are rigorously distinguished, so that what the impulse leads to (its end, its goal) is not a *becoming*, but a *being*, in relation to which becoming and its elements can appear as such. All becoming happens in time (since the elements of becoming are the 'not yet', the 'no longer' and the 'now'), and *being in its manifestation*, as the goal of becoming, is not only beautiful, but also *eternal*, that which is outside of time and makes the experience of time possible. Hence the metaphysical relationship between beauty, eternity and immortality.

"Well then," she said, "since love is always this [the impulse towards beauty], in what way and in what activity could the ardour and effort of those who pursue it be called love? [...] This special action is, in effect, *procreation* in beauty, both according to the body and according to the soul. [...] All men have a creative impulse, Socrates, not only according to the body, but also according to the soul, and when they reach a certain age, our nature desires to procreate. But it cannot procreate in ugliness, only in *beauty*. The union of man and woman is, in effect, procreation, and it is a divine work, for fertility and reproduction are what is *immortal* in living beings, which are mortal. [...] For love, Socrates

"It's not love of beauty, as you think," he said.

"What is it then?"

"Love of generation and procreation in beauty. [...] Now, why precisely of generation? *Because generation is something eternal and immortal* insofar as it can exist in something mortal. [...] Thus, according to this reasoning, love is necessarily also love of *immortality*."<sup>(18)</sup>

The relationship between Eros, impulse and procreation in beauty (and therefore participation in eternity) definitively shows the metaphysical nature of beauty: as the impulse towards beauty is the impulse towards being, the only possibility of participating in being during becoming is procreation; participating in being means participating in what is and does not become (neither arises nor perishes), in what is outside of time, in what, through its existence, provides the measure for the experience of time.

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18. *Ibid.*, 206 b -207 a [Spanish translation cited, pp. 254-255].

*Platonic-ontological features of Christian-Byzantine art*

One thing is already clear: beauty has a meaning in Plato that is not aesthetic, but ontological. Beauty is the manifestation of being at its various levels, from the sensory to the spiritual. In this sense, the impulse towards beauty is the same as the *impulse towards reality*; it sets us on the path towards the primordial being, towards the imperishable, immutable, eternal.

From here, it is possible to understand the concept of beauty as fluid in Neoplatonism, according to which the substances that something is made of or constructed from are understood as *levels of being*. Byzantine art establishes a hierarchy of materials based on the extent to which each material participates in the luminous, imperishable and eternal. From this perspective, we must judge the value of mosaics and goldsmithing. When sources from that period speak of the beauty of the material, of how great and sublime one is in comparison to another, we should not understand these judgements in an 'aesthetic' sense. The concept of beauty refers, starting with the material, to the exposure of the higher levels of reality. The complex value of materials cannot be grasped from the relativity of sensory stimuli, historically changing judgements of taste, or aesthetically conditioned psychological and individual impressions. When today's judgement of these works is based precisely on these factors, it overlooks their deeper intentions from an aesthetic point of view.

Rosario Assunto will demonstrate the powerful influence of Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas on medieval Christian art in his work on the theory of beauty in the Middle Ages. Here we can only mention the primacy of ontological religious meaning over purely aesthetic values. into medieval Christian art will be shown by Rosario Assunto in his work on the theory of beauty in the Middle Ages. Here we can only mention the primacy of ontological religious meaning over purely aesthetic values.

The dome [of the church] is not simply a hemisphere here, but the vault of heaven; the apse is the East, where Jesus Christ will appear as judge. The theophanies displayed here have no pedagogical or decorative value, but are the proclamation itself, the guarantee of the event that the living and the dead (facing East) await. The anticipated exposition is the action itself, which happens in advance; it is prophetic, like a dream. Time is an illusion, it is the eternal return; the serpent of Cronos encompasses the past, present and future with its circular movement. The transfer of forces happens in many ways. [...] Believers prostrated themselves towards Mother Earth in sacred caves; po-

They placed their hands on the tomb of Jesus Christ or the saints, thus imbuing rosaries or medals with their merits. Vision is contact from afar, and the power of images and architectural forms also acts upon the believer.<sup>19</sup>

Plotinus (*Enneads*, IV, 3, 11) expresses the conviction that a statue guarantees the presence of the god. Later, Christians misunderstood the theoretical basis of this idea and rejected it as idolatrous, which excludes an aesthetic conception of works of art. The ahistorical and extra-aesthetic aspect is present in all archaic communities, but it is contrary to modern society. The current interest in the archaic world is the result of a crisis in modern society and the categories of its cultural history. An essential feature of our time is, or was, the impulse towards the new, towards what is not yet; while the archaic world rejects the new, the ephemeral. All their effort and attention in creating works that we now consider artistic was directed towards what returns and persists; and this means avoiding subjective, particular events, including the aesthetic.

#### *Misunderstandings of the modern aesthetic attitude*

The misunderstanding in the way we see and understand, for example, Byzantine art is due to the fact that modern human beings are unable to coordinate their subjective and aesthetic form of experience with the ontological intention of the works. We are accustomed to attributing to them, as the goal of their configuration, *one* of the many possible interpretations of being. In this way, we classify them historically and place them on the same level as modern works, which continually discover new aspects of the world. However, these works were never intended to interpret the world, human beings or being; they wanted to be *reality*, they put forward that cosmological claim to totality that confers sacred meaning and is decisive for all works that arise in a mythical world, including those of the great non-European civilisations.

Modern humans tend to criticise the Greek concept of beauty on the grounds that it introduces a mistaken

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19. L. Hautecoeur, *Mystique et Architecture*, Paris, 1954, p. 287.

aesthetic categories in the natural world, which would be a very serious misunderstanding (as Benedetto Croce said), since aesthetics is exclusively a product of human activity and should not be sought or found in nature. In fact, the misunderstanding lies in our ignorance of the ontological meaning of the concept of beauty in Antiquity. We transfer modern problems to a field that has no common or similar elements with them.

This idea has a very important hermeneutic meaning. Plato explains in *Phaedrus* that everything written, like every work of art, remains silent until someone interprets it and makes it speak. This interpreter must adapt to the language of the work itself. Works that arise from sacred intent should not be interpreted in a purely formalistic manner, that is, according to the points of view of composition, chromatic relationships, and constructive principles; rather, these works require a precise knowledge of ontological meanings, without which the attempt to make the work speak fails and leads to a dilettantish pseudo-empathy based on subjective taste. This knowledge is not common among us, since for centuries the way of thinking and interpreting has moved further and further away from it. Thus, in order to carry out this task, completely new scientific efforts must first be made.

Furthermore, we have an interesting reference to the real nature reality of mythical and sacred works in the fact that after military conflicts, the victor attempted to completely destroy sacred buildings and images. These were the only valid form of being. Once destroyed, the very reality of the enemy disappeared. These destructions should not be understood in the modern sense as signs of barbarism or contempt for historical, artistic, or museum values.

#### *Plato's primordial forms and Mondrian's universal balance*

The non-aesthetic appreciation of material, forms and figures is not only found in the sacred world of times past, but also in today's secular art. Plato sees simple geometric forms (the straight line, the circle, the triangle, the sphere) as

beauty *itself* because he recognises in these elements the *primordial forms of being* (in *Timaeus* they serve to construct the world), structural elements of reality:

Indeed, by the beauty of figures, I do not mean what the masses would understand, such as the beauty of living beings or paintings, but rather, as the argument goes, I am referring to *straight or circular lines* and the surfaces or solids derived from them by means of lathes, rulers and set squares, if you understand me. For I assert that these things are not relatively beautiful, like others, but are always beautiful in themselves and produce their own pleasures that have nothing to do with scratching.<sup>20</sup>

Geometric shapes are levels of reality, *primordial forms, something that exists in itself and is not conditioned by the senses*. In contemporary art, there is a tendency to use primal forms to design a symbol of harmony, thereby rejecting the aesthetic copying of reality. This attempt may seem "Platonic," but in reality it takes place with completely different assumptions and with a completely different notion of the fundamental elements and forms of reality. te. Mondrian seems to allude to this in the following sentences:

Limited forms are *particular* elements, that is, they are not universal. It is evident that, to a certain extent, all forms are limited and, therefore, freeing oneself from their limitations is relative. It is clear that open forms are less limited than closed forms. Forms whose limits have no beginning and no end, such as circles, should be considered closed. Forms closed by straight lines are more open than those whose outline describes a curved line, since they arise from points of intersection of lines. I increasingly excluded all curved lines until, finally, my work consisted *solely of vertical and horizontal lines forming crosses, each separated and apart from the other. Verticals and horizontals are expressions of two opposing forces; this balance of opposites exists everywhere and dominates everything.*<sup>21</sup>

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20. Plato, *Philebus*, 51 c [Spanish translation cited, p. 95].

21. P. Mondrian, *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art*, New York, 1947, quoted in Walter Hess, *Dokumente zum Verständnis der modernen Malerei*, Hamburg, 1956, p. 101 [Spanish translation by José María Coco Ferraris in: W. Hess, *Documentos para la comprensión del arte moderno*, Buenos Aires, Nueva Visión, 1973, p. 141].

## 2. The definition of art

### *The divine origin of poetry*

The ontological definition of beauty now leads us to the question of how Plato understands art and the beauty of the work of art. In any case, art has no place in a realm "aesthetic" in which human beings would be freed from the compromise and seriousness of reality. Thus, Plato expressly states in *The Republic*: "And it is up to the founders of a state to know the guidelines according to which poets must forge myths and from which their creations must not deviate."<sup>22</sup>

For Plato, the *origin of art* is mysterious; if we derive art from divine inspiration, we cannot approach its origin. The origin of poetry from *mania*, madness, ecstasy ('being out of one's mind'), enthusiasm, divine rapture, gives it an objective character. Plato distinguishes four types of *mania* and lists them in *Phaedrus*: the ecstasy of the seer and the prophet, that of madness caused by a god, that of exaltation caused by the muses (art), and that of eros, that is, the ecstasy in which the soul contemplates sensory beauty and experiences beauty itself. Obviously, Plato is so impressed by the precision with which artists and poets expose and describe (especially because Plato denies that artistic creation is based on founded *knowledge*) that he sees them as a gift from the gods that allows us to overcome the helplessness and shortcomings of the human condition; Plato almost derives art from an act of *divine compassion*. In art, a spiritual process different from knowledge takes place: 'We said that the gods, taking pity on us, gave us Apollo and the Muses as companions and leaders of our dances, and we also mentioned a third, if we remember correctly, Dionysus.'<sup>23</sup>

Plato is repeatedly amazed at the ability of rhapsodes to recite and interpret Homer, for example; as *Ion* says, this gift does not derive from knowledge: the rhapsode speaks thanks to divine inspiration. The muse provokes enthusiasm in the poet, and the performers and listeners participate in this, as they can only understand the work in this way.

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22. Plato, *Republic*, 379 a [Spanish translation cited, p. 138].

23. Plato, *Laws*, II, 665 a [Spanish translation cited, p. 269].

*The original meaning of 'mimesis'*

If the material of a work of art already has ontological meaning, since through its properties *it alludes* to something ahistorical, lasting, eternal, and *participates* in this primal entity, the *exposition* of primal reality through that material is a reproduction, and in this sense an imitation (*mimesis*): Plato sees in this imitation the essence of art.

We must outline, albeit briefly, the concept of *mimesis* in the sense it had before Plato.

This term does not appear in Homer or Hesiod, nor do its derived adjectival or adverbial forms. Nor does it appear in the lyric poets, with the exception of Theognis and Pindar. According to Boisacq and Prellwitz, the etymological origin of *mimesis* is unclear. However, the fact that the word μῖμος, which is related to *mimesis*, spread throughout Sicily through the dramatic poetry of Sophron and became established as the name for the entire poetic genre shows that at that time (5th century BC) the concept was well known and frequently used.

Theognis laments that he cannot understand people's way of thinking, for whatever he does, good or bad, he is criticised by them, and so he says: 'but none of the fools know how to imitate'.<sup>24</sup> Pindar says that the flute player Midas knew how to 'imitate the funeral wail that sprang from the trembling jaws of Eurialus'.<sup>25</sup> Herodotus recounts that Ariandes, the governor of Egypt, imitated Darius.<sup>26</sup> He also recounts that Cambyses, the king of Persia, destroyed and burned many statues of gods when he conquered Memphis. He also mocked the statue of Hephaestus, which was the size of a dwarf. In his description of this statue, Herodotus says that it was "the image (μίμησις) of a pygmy".<sup>27</sup> We also find this word (meaning "imitation") used as a verb in Aeschylus (*Choephoroi*, 564; *Fragments*, 374). While the term *mimesis* does not appear in the surviving works of Sophocles, it can be mentioned in Euripides.

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24. Theognis, *Elegies*, I, 370 [Spanish translation by Francisco J. Navarro Gómez for this volume].

25. Pindar, *Pythian Odes*, XII, 20 [Spanish translation by Alfonso Ortega in: Pindar, *Odes and Fragments*, Madrid, Gredos, 1984, p. 213].

26. Herodotus, *History*, IV, 166.

27. *Ibid.*, III, 37 [Spanish translation by Carlos Schrader in: Herodotus, *History: Books III-IV*, Madrid, Gredos, 1979, p. 87].

nar many passages. In *Ion* Creusa describes to her son the embroidery she wove herself and in which she depicted him, and tells him that she had also depicted some snakes "in imitation of Erictonio".<sup>28</sup> (See also *Helen*: "You see before you your husband Menelaus, who has come here deprived of his ships and your spectre."<sup>29</sup>) See also verse 940, as well as *Electra*, 1037, and *Hippolytus*, 114.)

In Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs*, v. 109, we read that Dionysus, when he descends with his slaves to Hades and meets Heracles, tells him that he has come down because of the dead poet and that he has imitated his clothing (see also *Thesmophoria*, v. 156).

Moving on to Greek prose, we also find the term *mimesis* with the same meaning (for example, Thucydides, I, 95, 3). In his *Memoirs* (III, 10), Xenophon has Socrates ask the painter Parrasios whether painters are also capable of *representing* the spirit or whether it is unrepresentable.

Attic speakers also often use the verb μιμῶ-μαι. In Isocrates, it means 'to reproduce' or 'to represent': 'It would indeed be a shame if paintings reproduced the beauty of living beings and, on the other hand, children did not imitate good parents'.<sup>30</sup> Plutarch wonders in his *Table Talk* 'why we listen with pleasure to those who imitate angry and afflicted and disgusted when they debate these sufferings.' One possible answer says, "since the imitator is in a better situation than the one who truly suffers and differs from him in that he does not suffer, we, aware of this, delight and rejoice." Another response reads as follows: "since the truly irritated or afflicted person is seen with current feelings and emotions, while in imitation there appears a certain ingenuity and gift of persuasion, if it is done well, we naturally tend to enjoy the latter and feel saddened by the former."<sup>31</sup>

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28. Euripides, *Ion*, v. 1429 [Spanish translation by José Luis Calvo Martínez in: Euripides, *Tragedies*, vol. II, Madrid, Gredos, 1978, p. 206]. See also v. 451.

29. Euripides, *Helen*, v. 875 [Spanish translation by Luis Alberto de Cuenca in: Euripides, *Tragedies*, vol. III, Madrid, Gredos, 1979, p. 49].

30. Isocrates, *To Demonicus*, 11 [Spanish translation by Juan Manuel Guzmán Hermida in: Isocrates, *Speeches*, vol. I, Madrid, Gredos, 1979, p. 146]. See also *Areop.*, 84.

31. Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales*, 5, 673 c [Spanish translation by Francisco Martín García in: Plutarch, *Moral and Customary Works (Moralia)*, vol. IV, Madrid, Gredos, 1987, pp. 227-229].

Plutarch himself states in his work *De audiendis poetis* that poetry is an imitative art and that "[...] by its very nature, the ugly cannot be beautiful. But imitation, if it achieves similarity, whether of something ugly or something beautiful, is praised."<sup>(32)</sup>

Luciano recounts in his dialogue *On Dance* that a barbarian who visited Nero watched a dancer perform, and Nero then invited him to ask for whatever he wanted. The barbarian asked to take the dancer away with him, as through him he could convey his wishes and orders to his people: 'he performed with such clarity that, although he did not understand what was being sung, as he was half Greek, he understood everything'.<sup>33</sup> Later, Lucian talks about a dancer who portrayed (imitated) an enraged Ajax in such a way that he himself seemed to have gone mad, due to his exaggerated imitation. Most of the audience burst out laughing, but others were afraid because "they suspected that his excessive enthusiasm in imitation had led him into true madness".<sup>34</sup>

From these quotations, it can be deduced that the term *mimesis* and its derivatives mean 'imitation' or 'representation', and that these two meanings are not contradictory. This also applies to Plato. Thus, in *Cratylus*, we read:

If we wanted, I think, *to express* what is high and light, we would raise our hand towards the sky, *imitating* the very nature of the thing [...]. If we wanted to *indicate* a horse running, or any other animal, you know well that *we would adapt* our bodies and forms to theirs. [...] I believe that there would be a *manifestation* of something when the body, it seems, *imitated* what it intended to express.<sup>35</sup>

And in *The Republic*, Plato writes:

But when a speech is presented as if it were someone else speaking, would we not say that *it resembles his own diction as closely as possible?*

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32. Plutarch, *Quomodo adulescens poetas audire debeat*, 18 A [Spanish translation by José García López in: Plutarch, *Obras morales y de costumbres (Moralia)*, vol. I, Madrid, Gredos, 1992, p. 100].

33. Lucian, *De saltatione*, 64 [Spanish translation by Juan Zaragoza Botella in: Lucian, *Obras*, vol. III, Madrid, Gredos, 1990, p. 70].

34. *Ibid.*, 83 [Spanish translation cited, p. 78].

35. Plato, *Cratylus*, 423 a [Spanish translation by J. L. Calvo in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. II, Madrid, Gredos, 1983, pp. 432-433]. See also 423 d.

*to that of each character* who, as he anticipates, must speak? [...] And to resemble one another in speech or appearance, is it not *to imitate the one whom one resembles*? [...] In the present case, therefore, it seems that both he and the other poets compose the narrative through imitations.<sup>36</sup>

To understand the meaning of *mimesis* in Plato, we cannot continue to accumulate quotations. The precise interpretation of this term will emerge from an investigation of what the object of imitation should be in relation to art.

### *Object of imitation. Three levels of reality*

According to Plato, the highest level of reality is the primordial being, the realm of primordial figures and ideas. The entity that makes up our visible and audible (sensory) world is a "copy", a shadow of the original being, and we need knowledge ( $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\omicron\gamma\eta$ ) to integrate sensory phenomena into an order. For to know means *to grasp* what in this world of shadows the senses show us in a varied and changing way, that is, to gather it under an idea, in a figure that clarifies the essence of phenomena. To substantiate, to demonstrate, to know, is the ability to indicate the reasons for this knowledge of multiplicity, to ascertain the principles that govern the first world, the true entity. Therefore, to know and to demonstrate means to go back to that world.

Art as *mimesis* (imitation, representation) arises through the reproduction of the world of shadows. Since the objects of sensory perception are imitations of the original images, of the ideas that rational knowledge will make available to us, the artist is an *imitator of an imitation*, for he only captures the appearance of a reality that is itself an *ephemeral reproduction of original images*. Therefore, the artist is an impostor and an imitator (*Republic*, 598 b). He remains at the third level of reality, below the truth.

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36. Plato, *Republic*, 393 c [Spanish translation cited, pp. 161–162]. See also *Sophist*, 235 d-e, 267 a; *Republic*, 373 b, 501 b, 602 b; *Timaeus*, 29 b.

*Productive art and imitative art*

In any case, Plato distinguishes between *productive* art and *purely imitative* art. An example of productive art is architecture, which Plato considers to be on a higher level than painting and sculpture. Architecture does not imitate the world of shadows, but rather produces something that, thanks to art, exists in the world of shadows. This distinction later became very important in Renaissance art theory.

If imitation reproduces a reality whose original form coincides with the idea, productive art can also imitate ideas:

–Could you tell me in general terms what imitation (μίμησις) is? [...] For I believe we used to postulate *a single Idea* for each multiplicity of things to which we give the same name. Or do you not understand me?

–Yes, I understand you.

–Now let us take the multiplicity of your choice. For example, if you like, there are many beds and tables.

–Of course.

–But there are two Ideas of these pieces of furniture: one for the bed and one for the table.

–Yes.

–And do we not also say that the craftsman *directs his gaze towards the Idea* when he makes the beds or tables we use, and all other things in the same way? For no craftsman could make the Idea itself. Or

How could it? [...] If you want to take a mirror and turn it in all directions: soon you will see the sun and what is in the sky, soon the earth, soon yourself and all the animals, plants and artefacts, and all the things I have just mentioned.

–Yes, in their appearance, *but not in what they truly are*.

–Well, and you come to the aid of the argument at the right moment. One of these artisans is the painter, I believe. Or am I wrong?<sup>37</sup>

–And the bed maker? A moment ago you said that he does not make the Idea (that which we call a bed), but rather a particular bed.

–I did say that, indeed.

–Therefore, if you do not manufacture what it really is, you do not manufacture the real thing, but something that is similar to the real thing, yet is not real. [...]

Would you now like us to investigate what imitation is, based on these examples?

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37. Plato, *Republic*, 595 d - 596 e [Spanish translation cited, pp. 458-459].

- If you wish.
- Are there not three beds before us, one of which we say exists in nature and, as I understand it, was made by God? Or who else could have made it?
- By no one else, I believe.
- Another one is made by the carpenter.
- Yes.
- And the third, the one made by the painter. Is that not so?
- So be it.
- So the painter, the carpenter, God, these three preside over three types of beds. [...] Do you want us to give this one [God] the name 'producer of natures' with regard to the bed, or some other similar name?
- That is fair, since he has produced both this object and all others in nature.
- And what about the carpenter? Shall we say he is a craftsman who makes beds?
- Yes.
- Shall we say that the painter is also a craftsman and producer of a bed?
- Not at all.
- But what would you say about him in relation to the bed?
- It seems to me that the most reasonable way to describe him is "imitator" (μιμητῆρ'v) of that which the others are artisans of.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the painter is a pure reproducer, a sophist, for he simulates the non-real (external reality).

In *The Sophist* (265 a-b), Plato also distinguishes between productive art and imitative art. As a *productive* art, architecture takes precedence over sculpture and painting, which are limited to imitation. The same conceptual division is found in *Theaetetus* (266 c-d). Also in *The Sophist* (266 c), the painted house, unlike the built house, is a dream created for the awake: the craftsman who builds a bed is closer to truth and knowledge than the artist who paints a bed (*Republic*, 597 a-c). In *Cratylus* (430 d), Plato attributes 'correctness' to the plastic arts if they faithfully reproduce an object for the eyes. This concept of correctness needs to be clarified. It is important that for Plato, the measure of 'correctness' is at the same time a criterion of quality that allows him to distinguish a good work from a bad one.

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38. *Ibid.*, 597 a-e [Spanish translation cited, pp. 460-461].

*Human praxis as the subject of poetry and music*

Poetry is the art that deals with discourses and myths: Plato calls the poet a 'mythologist' (*Laws*, 941 b; *Republic*, 392 d, 398 b; *Phaedrus*, 61 b). The poet is the inventor of stories, of *actions*: past, present or future events: 'Is it not so that everything that is recounted by myth-makers or poets is a narration *of things that have happened, things that are happening and things that will happen?* [...] But the narration they carry out may be *simple*, or it may be produced by means of *imitation*."<sup>(39)</sup> The artist imitates *people who act* and who, through their actions, believe they are doing something good or bad (*Republic*, 603 c) and seem sad or happy.

*Action* is an essential element of poetry, its true object, for through it human beings manifest themselves in the struggle between reason and passion that characterises them. Human nature becomes the object of poetry, and poetry returns human beings to their very essence (*Republic*, 400 d-e, 401 a, 603 d, 605 a): "imitative poetry imitates, let us say, men who carry out voluntary or forced *actions*, and who, as a result of these actions, believe themselves to be happy or unhappy; and who in all these cases lament or rejoice."<sup>(40)</sup>

We can now understand the broad meaning of the concept of "correctness" in Plato: if art reproduces a level of reality (the world of shadows), the elements we have discussed must be manifested through its creation as essential features. Otherwise, art is meaningless.

*Music* is also imitative in this sense (*Laws*, II, 668 a). It is capable of exposing the behaviour of good and bad people, for which it resorts exclusively to the analogy between rhythms and harmonies and characters. Thus, only the musician can decide what type of rhythm corresponds to each way of life (*Laws*, 669 d-e, 798 d-e; *Republic*, 400 a). Dances are imitations of modes of behaviour that correspond to actions, destinies and characters (*Laws*, 795 e - 796 c).

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39. *Ibid.*, 392 d [Spanish translation cited, p. 160].

40. *Ibid.*, 603 c [Spanish translation cited, p. 470].

*Plato's critique of art*

Thus, an essential element of the object of art would be human action (ἠρά3τῃ) *insofar as it reveals attitudes and characters*. This means that the *current* content, the moral value of human actions, attitudes and passions is the basis for judging a work of art. This also gives rise to Plato's criticism of art: since art does not spring from knowledge, it is difficult for it to express the *current* meanings of human actions, and therefore in most cases leads to dangerous deception.

In the *Apology*, Socrates asks politicians, artisans, and poets about their wisdom, and the result in relation to poets is as follows: 'So, with regard to poets too, I soon realised that they did not do what they did out of wisdom, but out of certain natural gifts and in a state of inspiration, like soothsayers and those who recite oracles. Indeed, they too say many beautiful things, but they know nothing of what they say'.<sup>41</sup> Plato demonstrates in the following way that poets do not possess knowledge: the rhapsodes themselves (the interpreters of poets) say that they can only interpret *one* poet each (*Ion*, 530 d, 531 a); therefore, their skill does not come from knowledge, for those who know something know it not only in a particular case. A doctor must be able to cure more than one person. No poet can explain what he says. Thus, art does not take the path of knowledge, it does not seek the essence of things, the real nature of various objects, but is based on mere verisimilitude and appearances (*Republic*, 511 e, 602 a).

In this last objection against art, there is one more objection: that the artist not only *does not know*, but also addresses *appearances*, human behaviour as we find it in history, *in our ever-changing world*:

–Now consider this: what does painting seek to achieve with regard to each object, to imitate *what it is* as it is or *what it appears* to be as it appears? In other words, is it an imitation of reality or of appearance?

–Appearance.

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41. Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, 22 b-c [Spanish translation by J. Calonge Ruiz in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. I, Madrid, Gredos, 1981, p. 156].

–In that case, mimetic art is undoubtedly far from the truth, it seems; and that is why it produces all things but touches on each only a little, and this little is an image.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, Plato contrasts the realm of beauty (the radiance of the primordial being) with the beauty of art, and the beauty of art occupies a lower level, since the artist reproduces the lowest level of reality, which manifests itself in the world of shadows. For this reason, in Book V of *The Republic* (476 b), Plato deeply despises and excludes from the narrow circle of the knowledgeable those who "lovers of spectacle", to simple art aficionados: it denies them the ability to know the essence of beauty.

If beauty, at its lowest level in art, is the imitation or representation of what exists in the world of shadows, then any imitation of the passionate, chaotic, murky and evil is reprehensible:

–[We will not tolerate ...] Nor will we tolerate them representing vile and cowardly men who do the opposite of what we have already said, insulting and ridiculing each other and uttering obscenities, whether drunk or sober, and any other words or actions of this kind with which they degrade themselves and others. [...] Well then, Will they imitate the neighing of horses, the bellowing of bulls, the murmur of rivers, the roar of the sea, thunder and other similar noises?

No, for they will not be allowed to go mad or imitate madmen.<sup>43</sup>

In this context, Plato reaches what he considers to be the definitive conclusion: if art is imitation or representation of actions that in turn evoke passions in us, and if the masses sympathise more easily with passionate behaviour than with rational behaviour, it follows that poetic imitation of passions must be viewed negatively. Human beings...

[...] enters into internal discord and holds contradictory opinions at the same time regarding the same objects and thus finds itself, also in its actions, in dissent and in struggle with itself [..., for] our soul is filled with thousands of contradictions of this kind.<sup>44</sup>

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42. Plato, *Republic*, 598 b [Spanish translation cited, p. 462]; see also 377 c ff.

43. *Ibid.*, 395 e - 396 b [Spanish translation cited, pp. 165-166].

44. *Ibid.*, 603 d [Spanish translation cited, p. 471].

And it is the irritable part that has abundant and varied imitations, while the wise and calm character, always similar to itself, is not easy to imitate, nor to apprehend when imitated, especially by men of all kinds gathered in the theatre for a festival; because the imitation would be presenting a character that is foreign to them.<sup>45</sup>

In other words: since passions (which are not subject to reason) represent a loss in relation to human perfection, their imitation will inevitably be the representation of a non-reality, pure appearance. The artistic representation of passions can only be justified if they are *sublime* attitudes that represent a level of reality.

*Eikasia*, the imitation that art often engages in, is not the work of knowledge, but of opinion, since it leads to the vision of what is 'possible', not what is 'real'; *that is why Plato rejects it*. The 'possible', as an object of art, receives a negative assessment from Plato, while Aristotle later gives this concept a completely different function in the definition of art and beauty. For Plato, knowledge is directed towards the real and the true, not towards a possibility: the representation of human possibilities (and therefore also of human failure in the face of passions) is not, for him, a task worthy of mimesis.

#### *Binding reality as a worthy subject for art*

In The *Laws* (656 d - 657 a), Plato praises the ideal image of ancient Egyptian art, which is hostile to novelty and linked to hieratic, venerable forms: it is an immutable canon of the eternal, the religious, the ahistorical. This sacred art encompasses music and dance. Everything is in motion: the measure of movement is rhythm; the measure of voice (the combination of high and low sounds) is harmony; the connection between the two is the choir (*copsía*, 665 a). Singing and dancing give sounds and movements a legality, an order and a solidity that allow the person in the sacred choir to become part of the order of the eternal.

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45. *Ibid.*, 604 e [Spanish translation cited, p. 473].

The gods, *taking pity* on humankind, which by nature is subject to so many hardships, arranged for *a respite* from their sufferings in the form of alternating festivals, and, so that they might recover their original state, they gave them the Muses and Apollo, the guide of the Muses, as well as Dionysus as companions for their festivals, and also the education that comes from the festivals they celebrate together with the gods. [...] Other animals do not perceive order or disorder in the movements that bear the name of rhythm and harmony. He further maintains that the gods we said were given to us as dance companions are the ones who give us the sense of rhythm and harmony accompanied by pleasure, with which they move and direct us in dance, linking us together with songs and dances, and calling them choirs (χοροῦς) because the name of joy (χαρᾶς) belongs to their nature.<sup>46</sup>

So, what does this Platonic conception of art aspire to? *Reality*; in this way, it removes the space for hedonistic contemplation and for any form of aesthetic consideration of possible human behaviour. When art shows historical things, it is capable of exposing human 'possibilities' (including human failure), but the only possibility valid for Plato as an object worthy of art is that which manifests the essence of the human being in its perfection, virtuous action, while all failed, evil and passionate possibilities (which are also human possibilities) are excluded as appearance, as deception. Plato accepts art only in this sense: if it is linked to the highest pedagogical and moral aspirations. In dance, music, singing and choir, the movement of the body, the voice and the sounds are brought into harmony with their ethical, moral and eternal meaning. Faced with this fact, we cannot behave in an 'uncommitted', contemplative, aestheticist manner. Art here is a commitment that concerns us all; it is a means to achieve the perfection that we must all seek and realise. Plato explains in the third book of *The Republic* (401 ff.) how the education of the future guardians of the state is complemented by valuable fabrics, the contemplation of good architecture, pictorial works and noble utensils; for all these works are full of allusions to

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46. Plato, *Laws*, II, 653 c - 654 a [Spanish translation cited, pp. 244-246].

the values that are necessary for the superior lifestyle that is characteristic of human beings in their perfection. The passionate and the murky (which are also possibilities for human beings) should not be represented, as they are not part of the true nature of human beings: they are only a human deception, images of the apparent world.

*Plato's rejection of all 'aestheticism'*

If we review how Plato developed the problem of beauty and art, we see that all his judgements are determined by a passionate impulse towards unconditional reality; nowhere in his thoughts is there room for an 'aesthetic' attitude. If human beings consume, as Plato believed, transcendence, then the poetic (a creation that transforms the world of phenomena) requires the activation of the whole of human existence. This commitment of the whole of existence through art ultimately leads Plato to the thesis that human beings achieve the supreme work of art, the supreme form of tragedy, in the drama of the realisation of the State. In the *Laws*, the question of whether foreigners should bring their own works of art is answered as follows: 'Exalted foreigners, we will say, we too are poets of *the most beautiful and best tragedy* possible. Our entire political system consists of an imitation of the most beautiful and best life, which, incidentally, we maintain is truly *the most authentic tragedy*'.

Plato revisits the fundamental themes of his predecessors—res and gives them a theoretical foundation. The works of Pindar (which we understand as "literature") realise in time the sacred, eternal, immutable, that which is always current and therefore divine; thus, they are not aesthetic products. Instead of the mythical world and its manifestation, philosophical knowledge appears in Plato as the foundation of art. But the originally sacred meaning of imitative, representative activity remains present in Plato, who admits imitation if it captures *the unconditionally real, eternal, ahistorical*.

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47. Plato, *Laws*, 817 b [Spanish translation by Francisco Lisi in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. IX, Madrid, Gredos, 1999, p. 62].

In this way, Plato provided the religious eras of the West with the fundamental features of his theories of beauty and art, especially the Christian Middle Ages, which drew on Platonic and Neoplatonic concepts and rejected any aesthetic conception of art. Light, for example, as a factor in the configuration of the interior space of a cathedral, is a problem of representing a higher reality that has sacred significance; it is not an aesthetic task.

Plato's critical attitude towards art means the rejection of everything that does not have its roots in the realm of the primordial being, of everything that does not engage the whole human being, the rejection of the realm of the *possible*, in which the failure or success of human endeavours occurs and which for us is the realm of the aesthetic. Works of art, insofar as they only reproduce visible things (shadows of primal reality), are for Plato, compared to true reality, of the same type as dreams (*Sophist*, 266 c-f), and the works of artists are very close to the illusions of swindlers (*Sophist*, 235; *Republic*, 598 d).

With these ideas, Plato has always been considered the staunch enemy of all "aestheticism," of all forms of poetry as mere "literature." And this is why the trends in contemporary art that we have described can find their theoretical foundation in the first great Western exposition of the problem of "art beyond art": the Platonic one. However, this current attempt to overcome the confusion of aestheticism means the opposite. Today's 'art beyond art' seeks to manifest transcendence by bearing witness to human freedom. Plato also wants to celebrate human freedom and transcendence in works of art, but as a reflection of the divine, of the extra-historical. For him, art (which includes political, ethical and educational values) must return to nature, but as an element of that primal nature that Plato equates with the divine. For art comes from the divine, according to the theory of the origin of poetry in religious *mania*, in ecstasy, in the madness of the poet. For Plato, art is the testimony of human freedom, but as the realisation and consummation of the primordial divine nature in human beings.

The discussion of the problem of beauty in Antiquity only make sense to us if, instead of putting ourselves at the service of

historical scholarship, it can shed light on issues that concern us today. Only then is it justified to appeal to that "Western tradition" that is so often discussed in abstract terms. We have attempted to show that studying the theories of Antiquity can help us to properly judge current intentions and their modes of expression. The ideas of a contemporary artist will serve as an example below.

*Suprematism. Non-objectivity as primordial reality*

This is the art theory of Kazimir Malevich, the painter who in 1913 decided that a canvas with nothing more than a black square on a white background was a painting and sent it to an exhibition. The following quotes come from a still unpublished manuscript that Malevich, in his own words, gave to a friend in Berlin as a kind of spiritual testament before returning to Russia, so that no one could consider him a bourgeois, but clearly anticipating his disappearance from the sphere of power of the Communist Party, which was reactionary in artistic matters.<sup>48</sup>

Malevich writes:

According to general opinion, the goal of art must be beauty. [...] This goal arises from a peculiar human ability to see things that do not exist, to set goals that human beings cannot achieve. [...] All human beings and all 'artists' are enchanted by the 'beauty of nature'. [...] Is nature constructed according to the principles of beauty? For example, does the sun set to create beauty? Does the sun colour the edges of the clouds because it has artistic talent?

Are the hills, valleys and ravines that enchant human beings not the result of catastrophes and land movements, rather than the laws of beauty?

Malevich wonders what it is that we call 'reality'. His answer is this: reality is nothingness. If art wants to attain primal reality, rather than settling for

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48. Malevich's manuscript has already been published: see K. Malevich, *The Non-Objective World*, trans. Juan Pablo Larreta, Seville, Doble J, 2007.  
[Translator's note]

apparent figures, it must *lack objectivity*; only then will it achieve its goal: "If there is a *truth*, it lies only in non-objectivity, in *nothingness*."

Thus, Malevich also rejects (albeit from a different starting point) art in the aesthetic sense, since the world of objects and individuations is, for him, an *illusion*; *true* art must advance towards primordial reality if it is to fulfil its task. Therefore, what Malevich aspires to cannot be understood using the aesthetic categories that were current in his time.

Art today is beginning to separate itself from objective and practical realism and move towards non-objectivity. It thus reaches that limit where art ceases to be art in the usual sense. The essence of art is elevated to another plane. This transition to another plane *leads to the destruction of objective phantoms*, until their total elimination. Throughout the history of painting, the object has never played a decisive role, but it was placed in the foreground by realism, one might even say by the dictatorship of realism. The dethronement of practical-real objects by 'new art' in the 20th century led most people to accuse this art of destroying the practical spirit and art itself. But the accusers are greatly mistaken: the destruction of the objective world does not mean the destruction of art or the destruction of the spirit of art. On the contrary, it restores the rights of the spirit of art, elevating it to non-objective truth, to a new reality of being. When the spirit of free action attempts to break out of the limits of the object, it abandons the form of objective-practical culture and manifests non-objectivity as nothingness liberated from the catastrophe of the form of species, consciousness, culture, and perfection.

Malevich called his art "Suprematism." It was an attempt to achieve "liberated nothingness" through his work. If art must liberate nothingness in order to detach itself from the object, break down the boundaries of the aesthetic and advance towards primal reality, how can it re-present anything?

The essential content of Suprematism is the totality of emotions without object, natural, without goal. But this does not mean that non-objective performance will not find forms for the majority. On the contrary, Suprematist non-objectivity makes possible creations similar to those of nature, such as the monta-

The consciousness of most people understands "nothingness" as inactivity, as emptiness, and therefore rejects it and even considers it dangerous to our lives. In reality, this 'nothingness' does not mean emptiness, but rather action in a sphere that human beings have not yet been able to enter. [...] In many cases, the painter is convinced that he is enhancing culture when he transfers objective values to his canvas. But he forgets that his canvas is only the basis for assumptions that are absorbed by non-objectivity. He forgets that on the surface of his painting, space and time disappear and a new pictorial reality emerges that the crowd cannot see.

Malevich says that connecting with objective reality implies surrendering to utilitarian ends and that objective reality only reflects partial aspects of the primordial entity. Art that remains attached to this reality and represents it "aesthetically" is at the service of an apparent reality. This rejection of the apparent world corresponds to Plato's criticism of the imitation of "world of shadows". Suprematism "creates works that cannot be used either in a practical or aesthetic sense. [...] For the painter, imitating nature is not a cognitive process. In my opinion, the new work of art can only consist of manifesting, through unconscious creation, cosmic reality as a non-objective reality".



## ILLUSTRATIONS



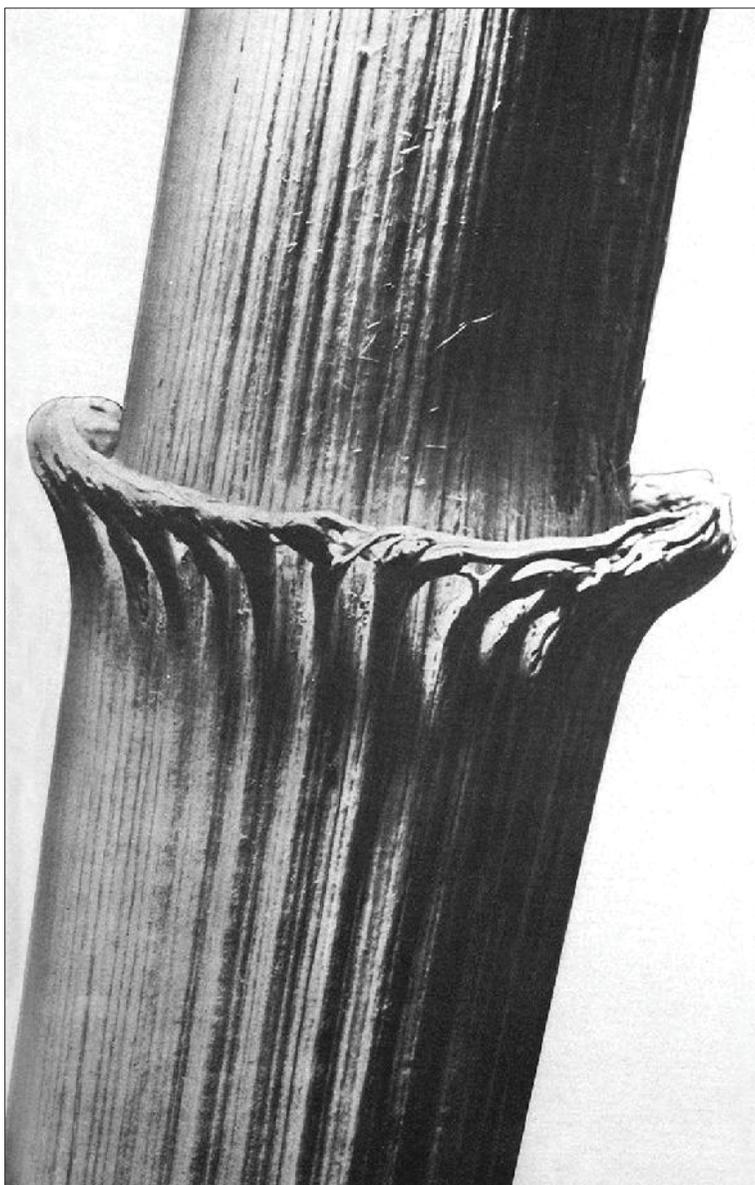
1. Mud footprint



2. Dried mud



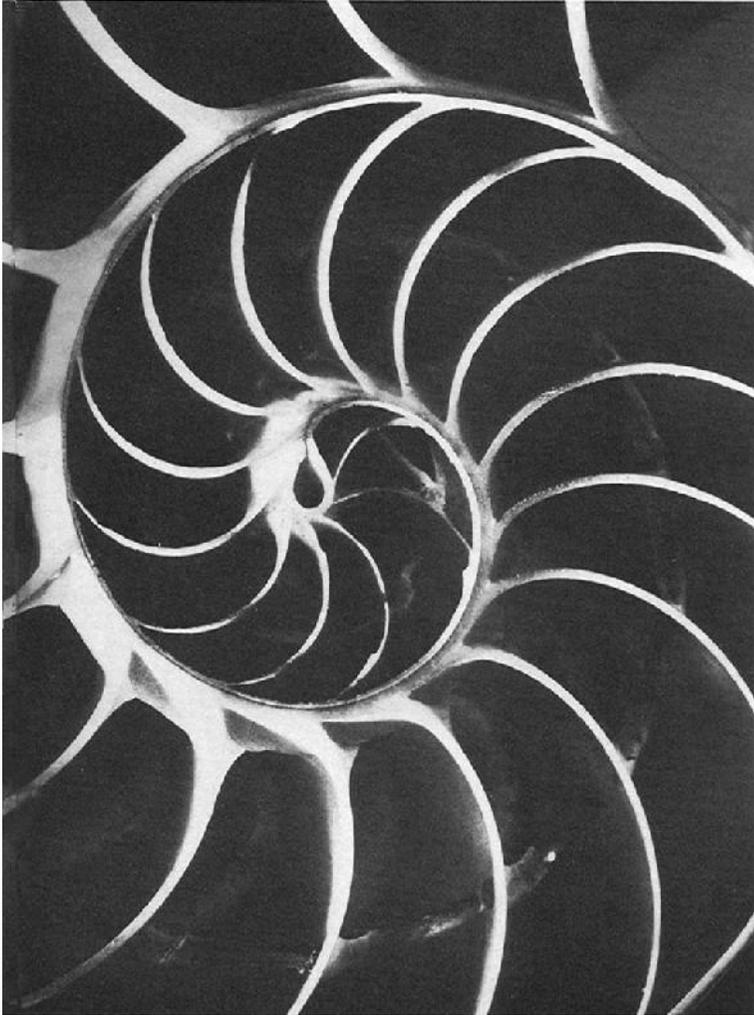
3. Detail of a sculpture by Karl Hartung (1960/61)



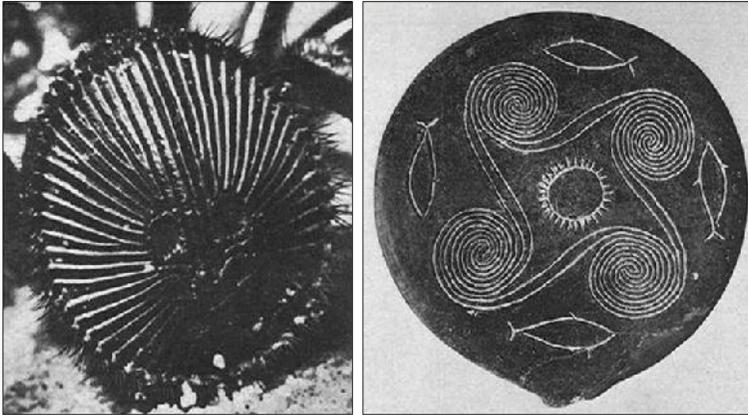
4. Reed stalk



5. Tendrils of a passion flower



6. Shell of a nautilus, a cephalopod (cross-section)



7 (left). Chitin shell of a cyclocosmia spider

8 (right). Cycladic "frying pan" from Naxos, 22 cm high. It was used in rituals and depicts a sun, spirals and fish. 3000 BC. Athens, National Museum



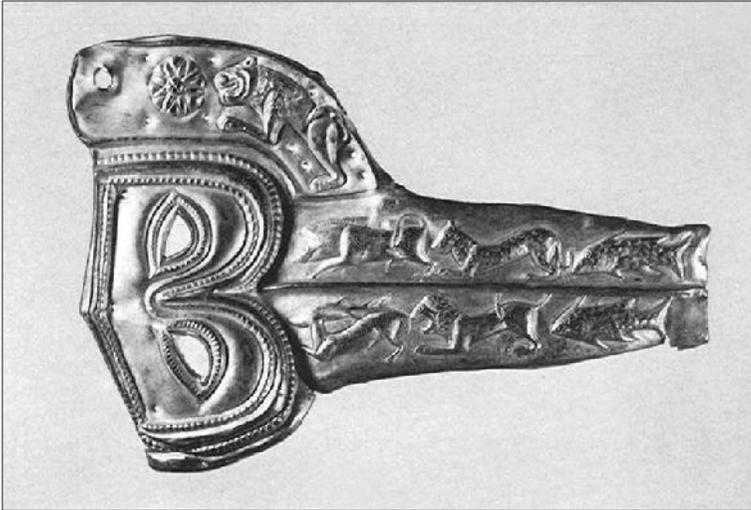
9. Dark agate seal (photographed in the impression). From Midea, in Argos. Circa 1500 BC. Athens, National Museum



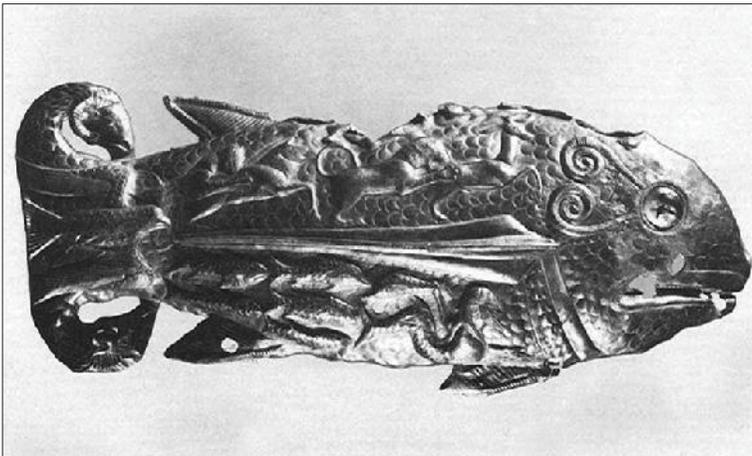
10. Cult vessel in the shape of three doves. Clay, 12 cm high. Early Minoan, 2200-2000 BC. Giamalakis Collection

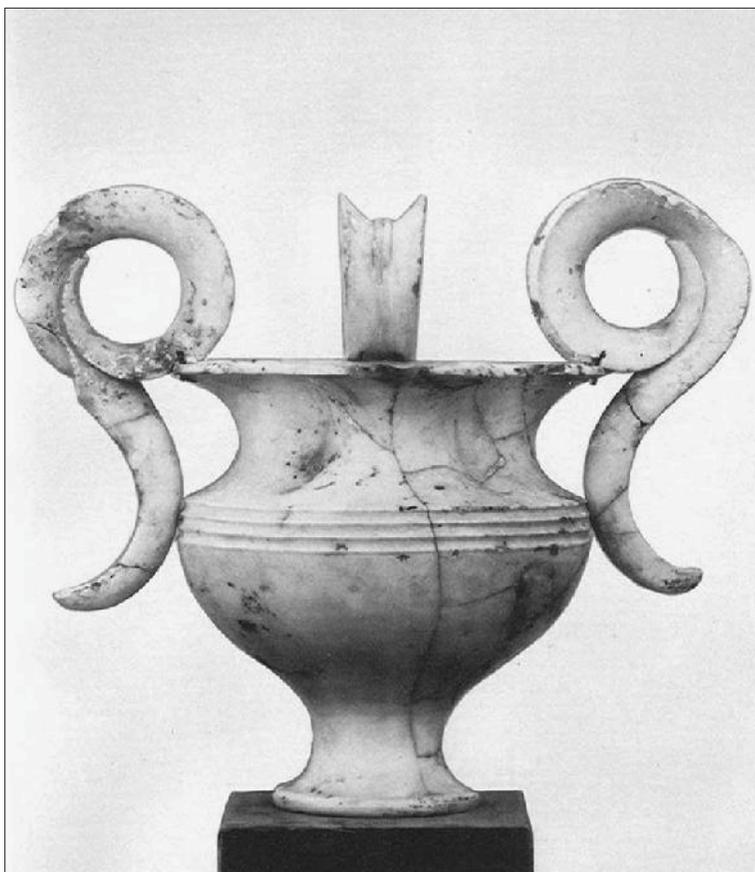


11. Plate with stand. Camares style. 54 cm in diameter. From the Old Palace of Phaistos, Crete. Middle Minoan, 1850-1700 BC. Heraklion (Crete), museum



12 and 13. Tip of a dagger sheath (19 cm long) and fish-shaped shield emblem (41 cm long). Laminated and embossed gold. Scythian. Found in Vetersfelde (Brandenburg). Early 5th century BC. Berlin, Old State Museums





14. Alabaster cult amphora. Palace of Mycenae, tomb IV. 24.3 cm high. Circa 1600 BC. Athens, National Museum



15. Gryphon head. Bronze jewel. From Olympia. Height: 27.8 cm.  
Circa 650 BC. Olympia, museum



16. Head of a marble idol from Amorgos. Height: 35.5 cm. Cycladic, 2500–2000 BC.



17. Lion from the chariot of Cybele and giant. From the Gigantomachy on the north frieze of the Treasury of the Sifnians at Delphi. 64 cm high.

Circa 525 BC. Delphi, museum



18. Sphinx of Naxos, in Delphi. Marble. 2.32 metres high. Circa 570 BC. Delphi, museum



19 (left). Marble idol from Naxos, 27.5 cm high. Cycladic, 2500-2000 BC.  
Paris, Louvre Museum

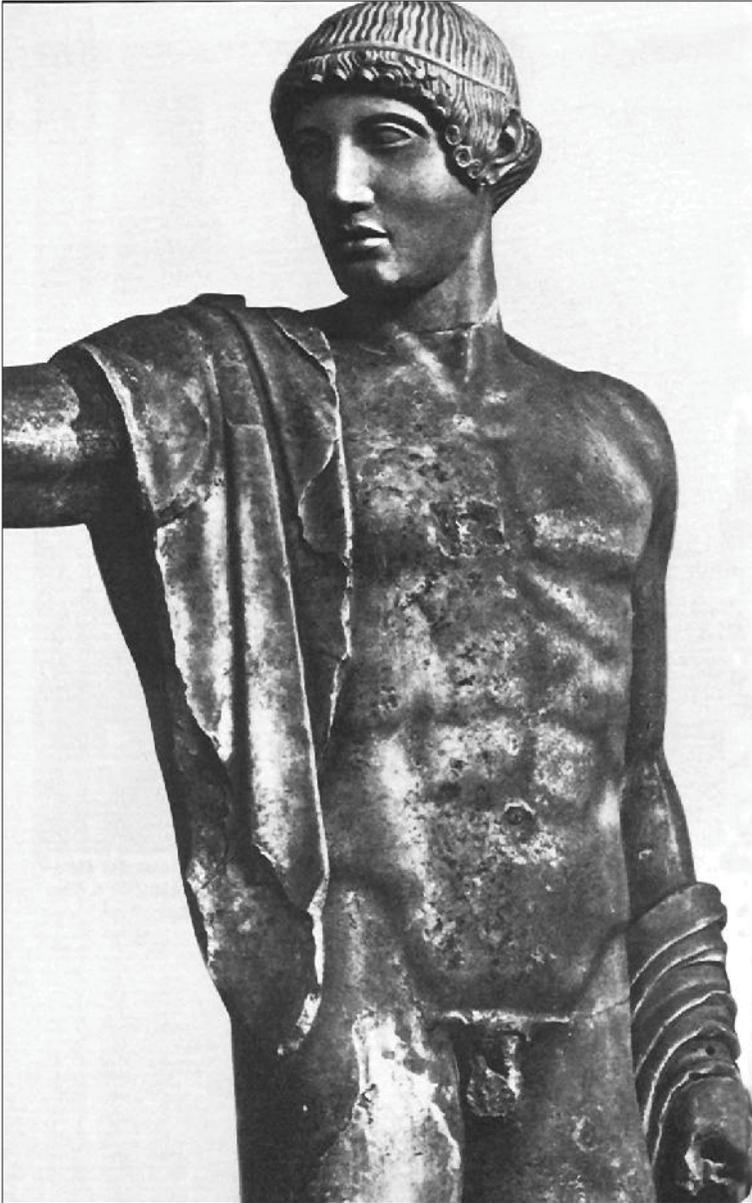


20 (right). Standing youth, from Attica. Parian marble. 1.93 metres high.  
Archaic, circa 610 BC. New York, Metropolitan Museum



21 (left). Standing female figure with pomegranate, 'Berlin goddess'. From Cythera, Attica. Marble. Circa 580 BC. Berlin, Old State Museums

22 (right). Head of a statue of a girl from the Acropolis. Paros marble. Circa 500 BC. Athens, Acropolis Museum



23. Apollo. From the western façade of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia. Parian marble. 2.75 metres. Circa 460 BC. Olympia, Museum

### III. THE EMERGENCE OF AESTHETICS. ARISTOTLE

#### 1. **Techne and poiesis**

##### *The problem statement*

When does a "beautiful" work cease to be "reality", a "primordial entity"? When and how does it cease to be binding? When does it begin to be a spiritual mediator between the world and the subject (in the sense that it is the expression of 'possible' views, the discovery of special aspects and possible interpretations of reality, the expression of a subjective confrontation with being)? When, with what concepts and through what questions is the field of aesthetics clarified in its own structure?

Until now, we have used the term 'aesthetics' and the corresponding adjective as if its meaning were self-evident. But in order to move towards a definition of this concept, we need to analyse and interpret in detail several passages from Aristotle's *Poetics*, which over the centuries has provoked a huge amount of commentary.

The *Poetics* begins with this sentence:

Let us discuss poetic art itself (ἡ ποίησις αὐτῆς) and its types (εἴδη αὐτῆς), what function (δύναμιν) each one has, how myths should be constructed (ὡς δεῖ συνίστασθαι τοὺς μύθους) so that poiesis is beautiful (ἰαλῶς), the number and nature of its parts (πόσων καὶ ποίων), and likewise the other things that belong to the same investigation, beginning first, as is natural, with the first questions.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1447 a 8-13 [Spanish translation (slightly modified) by Teresa Martínez Manzano and Leonardo Rodríguez Duplá in: Aristotle, *Poetics. Magna Moralia*, Madrid, Gredos, 2011, p. 35].

To keep in mind all the elements of the problem statement, we must also quote the following sentences:

The epic and tragic poetry, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most of the art of playing the flute and the zither *are all, taken together, mimesis*. But they differ from each other in three respects: either in imitating with different *means*, or in imitating different *things*, or in imitating in different *ways* and not in the same way.<sup>2</sup>

When reproducing Aristotle's text, we deliberately avoid translating terms such as *poiesis*, *mýthos* and *mímesis*, as it is the interpretation that will explain their meaning to us.

#### *Broad meaning of the concept of 'poetics'*

In our opinion, the usual translation of the term *poiesis* as 'poetry' and of the title Μσπὶ Μοτῆττ1ης as *On Poetic Art* does not capture the full scope of Aristotle's work. Although the surviving parts deal mainly with the art of writing poetry, there is no doubt that Aristotle also refers to the visual arts and music. Following the last sentences quoted, Aristotle writes: 'For just as some imitate with the help of colours and shapes [...] and others do so with their voices, so too, in the arts mentioned, all carry out imitation through rhythm, words and harmony, using these resources separately or in combination'.<sup>3</sup> Thus,

Aristotle's *Poetics* has a much broader semantic scope than the translation of *poiesis* as 'poetry' suggests. Plato also emphasises in *The Symposium* that it is surprising that poetics is understood as the art of poetry, since the word *poiesis* properly designates a much broader and more important phenomenon, that of production, of which poetry *is only one part*.

#### *A partial aspect:*

You know that the idea of 'creation' (*poiesis*) is something multiple, for in reality every cause that brings anything from non-being into being is creation, so that also the works produced in all the arts (*technai*) are creations, and the craftsmen who produce them

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2. *Ibid.*, 1447 a 14-18 [Spanish translation cited (slightly modified), p. 35].

3. *Ibid.*, 1447 a 19 ff. [Spanish translation cited, p. 35].

They are all creators. [...] But you also know [...] that they are not called creators, but rather have other names, and that a part of the whole of creation has been separated, that which concerns music and verse, and is called by the name of the whole. Only this is called 'poetry', and those who possess this portion of creation are called 'poets'.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Difference and relationship between *téchne* and *poiesis**

First, we must clarify what Aristotle means by *poiesis*, in order to derive from there the various types of *poiesis*: poetry, painting, dance, music, etc. The traditional title of the book, Μσπὶ Μοηηττ1ης, is the short version of Μσπὶ Τ3ςνῆς Μοηηττ1ης, which gives rise to the Latin translation *Ars poetica*. The discussion of the question of what *téchne* means in Aristotle leads very close to the phenomenon of *poiesis*. Aristotle expressly states that *all téchne is poiesis, but not all poiesis is téchne*, since the concept of *poiesis* is much broader.

For Aristotle, *téchne* is that special *poiesis* that produces *in relation to a foundation* (λόμως). In chapter I of the first book of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle says that the object of *téchne* is the general (1αθόλου), so that the technician knows the foundation (αἰτία), the reason (δτόττ) for what he produces. Thus, *téchne* is a form of knowledge.

#### *The duality of form and matter*

All *poiesis* (including what we now call 'art') consists of producing, that is, moving from non-being to being. This should not be understood in the sense that *poiesis* produces something from nothing (the Greeks did not know the idea of creation from nothing). For Aristotle, becoming (and therefore also the emergence of something) is the transformation of something into something else, which happens when something obtains a new form or figure (σίδος): a stone becomes a statue. From this follows the duality, essential to Plato and Aristotle, between matter (ύλη) and form (σίδος), which is very important in the Western tradition for the problem of *poiesis* in general and of art (and of emergence) in particular.

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4. Plato, *Symposium*, 205 b - c [Spanish translation cited, p. 252].

creation of a work of art) in particular and which has also been the source of many misunderstandings.

Aristotle explains the nature of *poiesis*, or production, using the example of the sculptor: he gives a new form to a given material (stone, bronze, clay). The source of the work is the material; the means by which the work comes into being is the form. To understand the special structure of *poiesis*, we must clarify the relationship between matter and form. These two elements, Aristotle emphasises, *should not be understood separately* if we want to understand the process of *poiesis*. We must understand *the unity of the elements* in and through which *poiesis* arises.

When we encounter something as *matter*, and knowing that it can take different forms, as *possibility* (a stone has the possibility of taking on different shapes that define it), as the unlimited, as the indeterminate and therefore obscure, unclear, as *hýle* (this term originally refers to the forest in which one gets lost because there is no limiting point of orientation), as formless matter? Stone, bronze, clay are not the same reality for the artist as they are for the non-artist, because for the artist they represent the plurality of possibilities (δύναμις) from which he will have to choose in order to create his work. Michelangelo says in one of his sonnets that the art of the sculptor consists of removing the excess marble to reveal the figure that is there and that acts in the spirit of the sculptor.

This relationship between matter and form is evident in *all types of poiesis*, both technical and 'artistic', since even a shoemaker (for example) understands, *in relation to the shape of a shoe he has in mind*, a piece of leather as 'matter', as

The "possibility" of a shoe. Similarly, to a sculptor, a stone appears as matter, something unlimited, in relation to the figure that he must shape in its form, within its limits. Thus, the artist sees matter as something unordered, unshaped, once a formative, shaping principle has begun to work.

#### *The essence of art: the construction of myths and mimesis*

There are several types of *poiesis*: a) through a *techné*, b) through a faculty (δύναμις), c) through thought, d) through chance: "all productions (ποίησις) come either from some art (ἀπὸ τέχνης) or from some faculty (ἀπὸ δυνάμεις)".

through chance: "all productions (ποίησις) come either from some art (ἀπὸ τέχνης) or from some faculty (ἀπὸ δυνάμειος) or from thought (ἀπὸ δτανοίας). Some of them also occur spontaneously and by chance [...]"<sup>5</sup>

Now we must define that special type of *poiesis* from which works of poetry, plastic arts, music, dance, etc. arise. Aristotle delimits the concept of *poiesis* at work here by saying that τέχνη νοητή<sup>1</sup> is found above all in the knowledge of 'how myths must be constructed so that *poiesis* is beautiful'. And the following sentence defines artistic *poiesis* as *mimesis*: 'The epic and tragic poetry, comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most of the art of playing the flute and the zither are all, taken together, imitations'.<sup>6</sup>

Here, two new terms have been added, whose meaning we must examine: *mýthos* and *mímesis*. Translating *mýthos* as 'fable' or 'story' is insufficient, as it would be completely incomprehensible in relation to music: what could a fable mean when playing the flute and strumming the zither? But also in relation to painting: what fable is there in a still life? Hardy translates into French (in Budé's edition) '*façon de composer la fable*', while Gudeman is more cautious in German: '*wie die dichterischen Stoffe gestaltet werden müssen*'.<sup>7</sup> All Italian translators, from Robortellus to current interpreters such as Valgimigli, translate the concept of *mýthos* without hesitation as "fable" and *mimesis* as "imitation". Robortellus, the first Renaissance commentator on Aristotle's *Poetics*, writes: "*Tragoedia est imitatio actionis illustris*".<sup>8</sup> Castelvetro translates *mimesis* as *rassomiglianza*, "likeness".<sup>9</sup> In the same vein, Victorius translates: "*Est autem actionis quidam imitatio fabula*".<sup>10</sup>

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5. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1032 to 28 [Spanish translation by Tomás Calvo Martínez in: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Madrid, Gredos, 1994, p. 300].

6. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1447 to 15 [Spanish translation cited, p. 35].

7. In Spanish, these two translations, among others, have been proposed: "how arguments should be constructed" (José Alsina Clota, in: Aristotle, *Poetics*, Barcelona, Icaria, 1997, p. 19); "how myths should be assembled" (Valentín García Yebra in: Aristotle, *Poetics*, Madrid, Gredos, 1974, p.126; see pp. 49-124 for García Yebra's analysis of various translations of the *Poetics*). [*Translator's note*]

8. *Librorum Aristotelis de arte poetica explicationes*, Basel, 1555, p. 45.

9. *Poetica d'Aristotele*, Basel, 1576, p. 11.

10. *Commentarii in primum librum Aristotelis de arte poetarum*, Florence, 1573, p. 60.

## 2. Mimesis, myth and praxis

### *Original meaning of the concepts 'mýthos' and 'mimesis'*

The etymological dictionaries of J. B. Hoffmann and E. Boisacq state that the Indo-European root of the Greek word *mýthos* is *mau* or *mou*. The Attic verb *mythizo*, 'to speak', 'to think', 'to reflect', is said in Laconic *mousiddo*. The Lithuanian word *mausti*, which means 'to desire ardently', refers above all to the realm of original thought. During worship, the god is invoked through the word, and an ardent desire is directed towards him. Thus, the root of the word *mýthos* names the space in which *speaking, doing and thinking are not yet separated*, and not only when a god is invoked, but also in everyday language. Later on, the meanings of speaking and thinking will be separated from reality and action.

In the original meaning of *mýthos*, the word always refers to an event (for example, *Iliad*, XVIII, 252); something happens in the spoken word; to speak is to do; when the priest recounted the myth of cosmogony, the creation of the world took place at the moment of speaking.

The original meaning of *mýthos* in Homer underwent a profound change when, in Plato, 'myths' became tainted with the least truthful, the least real, the fabulous. Plato's position is a transition to that of the Alexandrians, who understand myth in a negative way, as a *false narrative*.

Walter F. Otto has masterfully explained the ambiguity, that is, the original meaning and the later meaning of the term *mýthos*:

A 'myth' is usually understood to be a story about fabulous things. [...] The Greek word *mýthos* acquired this meaning relatively early on, when traditional stories about the gods and ancient times began to be *subjected to rational criticism*. [...] Opposite *mýthos*, understood in this way, stands *lógos*, that which is thought and spoken clearly. [...] *Logos* refers to the 'word' from the *subjective* point of view of the person who thinks and speaks as thought and calculated. [...] In another completely different sense, that is, *objective*, *mýthos* means 'word'. It does not refer to something thought, calculated, full of meaning, but to *what is effective and real*. [...] There can be no doubt about the original meaning of the 'word'.

bra" that the Greeks called *mýthos*. It is the word for "real," but above all for what has actually happened in the past. [...] Ancient Greek has a series of designations for 'word', each of which understands it in a particular sense [...] While *epos* designates it from the *voice*, as that which is said, and *logos* from *understanding* and *attention*, as that which is thought, the 'word' has a very particular weight when it is called *mýthos*. As seen in Homer, *mýthos* is, in comparison with *lógos*, not only the older expression, but also corresponds to an older concept of the essence of the word; it is the 'word' as immediate testimony of *what was, is and will be, as self-revelation of being in the ancient and venerable sense that does not distinguish between being and word.*<sup>11</sup>

What does *mýthos* mean in Aristotle's text? Before answering this question, we must complete the explanation of the meaning of the term *mimesis* that we began in relation to Plato. The Indo-European root of the Greek word *mimesis* is *mei* (*mai*, *mi*), which probably means 'to deceive'. This root is present in Sanskrit in the word *maya*, which means

"Change," "transformation," in the negative sense of "deceptive image." Through *nimayon*, "exchange," we obtain *maya*. Exchange does not refer only to changing the formal figure, but also to changing the figure in the proper sense, to changing the way in which the entity manifests itself and emerges from concealment. The entity is now different than it was before the change. If, after the transformation, we see a *deceptive image*, the entity is not truly revealed. From *mimesis* as change (and in this sense also as imitation) arises deception, the lie.

Two main meanings seem to be connected with *mimesis*: to reveal (to bring out of concealment) and to change, to transform, that is, to show something that has emerged from change, which does not preserve the original entity as it was: deception, appearance.

Does  $\mu\mu\sigma\iota\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$  mean for Aristotle a *deceptive transformation* (as it does for Plato in relation to art) or a *manifestation*, a *revelation*? Does  $\mu\mu\sigma\iota\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$  mean the exposition of a *fable* (*mýthos*) or of a *truth*, of a primal entity (*mýthos* in the original sense)? It is clear that the interpretation of the terms *mimesis* and *mýthos* lies at the heart of Aristotle's conception of art.

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11. W. F. Otto, *Gesetz, Urbild und Mythos*, Stuttgart, 1951, republished in: *Die Gestalt und das Sein*, Darmstadt, 1955, pp. 25 ff.

### *The object of artistic mimesis: human praxis*

How does Aristotle define the object of mimesis? The second chapter of *Poetics* begins as follows:

On the other hand, since those who engage in mimesis do so in relation to people who perform a praxis (μιμούμενοι πράττοντες), and it is necessary that these be noble or base (since characters are almost always reduced to these two types, since, in terms of character, all men are distinguished by vice or virtue), mimesis is of people better than us, worse than us, or similar to us. Painters do the same.<sup>12</sup>

That the *poiesis* referred to here is not only poetry, but all *poiesis* carried out through *mimesis*, all forms of "art", is made clear once again in the following passage, in which Aristotle gives the example of three painters: "Polygnotus painted better people, Pauson worse people, and Dionysius people similar to us".<sup>13</sup>

What is meant by μίμησις τῆς πράξεως (mimesis of praxis)? If we translate it in the usual way, as 'mimesis of those who act', this makes no more sense than translating *mýthos* as 'fable'. Are a lyric poem about nature or a painting depicting a still life not works of art? And how could music be the mimesis of people acting?

### *Clarification of the concept of 'praxis'*

What does Aristotle mean by *praxis*? Most commentators on *Poetics* do not ask how Aristotle distinguishes *praxis* from *poiesis*. What is produced by *poiesis* is always a *means* to something else; for example, all the actions that lead to the production of a house have their end and goal (and therefore their meaning) *not in themselves*, but in the house to be built. On the contrary, *praxis* is any action that has meaning and significance *in itself*, which is not a means to something else, but *an end in itself*. For example, the actions that form part of

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12. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448 a [Spanish translation cited (slightly modified), p. 37].

13. *Ibid.*

Life at the various biological levels (vegetative, sensitive, rational) is *praxis* for Aristotle, since life *itself* gives *meaning and sense* to the phenomena it encounters (for example, the meaning of food, sexual partner, that which causes fear or hope).

Most misunderstandings about the definition of art as μίμησις τῆς πράξεως arise because interpreters of *Poetics* read this text from a literary perspective, without taking into account the essential philosophical difference between *poiesis* and *praxis* (*poiesis* is also action). Aristotle writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: 'Production (ποίησις) is distinct from action (πράξις)'; 'neither is action production, nor is production action'.<sup>14</sup> And in *Metaphysics*: 'Since none of the actions (τῶν πράξεων) that have an end constitute the end, but rather something relative to the end [...], none of them is properly action or, at least, is not perfect action (πράξις) (since it is not the end). In the latter, on the contrary, both the end and the action are present.'<sup>15</sup>

#### *Art as mimesis of praxis*

From this, something decisive can be deduced: not every action (and *poiesis*, or production, is also an action, albeit an imperfect one) is identical to *praxis*; but actions that are only *means* to an end and have *no* meaning in themselves *cannot be the object of the mimesis that defines the fine arts*, only actions that have their goal in themselves and therefore *have meaning in themselves*. These are actions that form a 'whole'. In everyday life, our actions do not usually have this 'character of *praxis*', but are only fragments of the realisation of our existence, means to various ends.

What actions have a "*praxis* character"? Aristotle expressly states in *Poetics* (1448 a) that only actions in the realm of *ethos* possess this character; this is where it is decided whether a person is of high, medium or low *praxis*. This assessment can only be made of human beings, not of plants or animals. Only human beings can be described as 'good', 'regular'

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14. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140 a 2 and 6 [Spanish translation by Julio Pallí Bonet in: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics. Eudemian Ethics*, Madrid, Gredos, 1985, pp. 273-274].

15. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1048 b 18 ff. [Spanish translation cited above, pp. 376-377].

Therefore, μίμησις της πράξεως does not refer to any action that is offered as an object of *mimesis*, but only to human *praxis*, with its possibility of being good, average or bad and with its meaning derived from *éthos*. There can also be *mimesis* of objects, provided that they obtain a positive or negative meaning *in relation to human consummation* and *mimesis* shows this character of theirs.

To clarify this idea, we must refer to another text. In the first book of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that an artist is considered good, average or bad depending on whether their work is good, average or bad. Similarly, Aristotle says that in order to consider a human being good, average or bad, we must first clarify what work (ἔργον) is proper to him, that which corresponds only to him, and whether or not he carries it out. 'Indeed, as in the case of a flute player, a sculptor, and all craftsmen, and in general those who perform some work or activity, it seems that goodness (αγαθόν) and the good (su) are in the work, so too, without doubt, in the case of man, if there is some work that is proper to him (τὸ ἔργον αὐτοῦ).'<sup>16</sup>

What does the work of human beings consist of, ἔργον ἀνθρώπων? Human beings live within phenomena (φαίνόμενον = that which is shown) that they must understand: they do this advancing through the levels of knowledge, which lead him from σμνηρία, through τέχνη and σπουδή, to σοφία. Knowledge is not enough for human beings, for they must give their passions and impulses a control (ἕξις) that is commensurate with the rationality they have attained (λόγος). Aristotle calls this *ethical* behaviour (which is the work of human beings) ἡρακτις ἰατα λόγων, self-realisation in accordance with the *lógos*, the behaviour of human beings to control their passions, which must be subject to *the lógos*: "If, then, the work of man (ἔργον ἀνθρώπων) is an activity of the soul (σύνεστις τῆς ψυχῆς) according to reason (ἰατα λόγον), [...] it follows that the good of man (ἀνθρώπων ἀξίον) is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (ψυχῆς σύνεστις ἰατ'ἀρετῆν)".<sup>17</sup>

In summary: the object of artistic *mimesis* cannot be just any action, nor can it be a productive action that does not have its own goal and meaning, nor one that, having its own meaning, does not have its own goal.

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16. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097 b 25 [Spanish translation cited (slightly modified), p. 143].

17. *Ibid.*, 1098 a 7 ff. [Spanish translation cited (slightly modified), p. 144].

being a self-realisation (πραξις), is beyond the distinction between good and bad. The object of *mimesis* can only be the specific action of the human being, the *praxis* that is determined by the *ethos* and derives its meaning from it. Only this, according to Aristotle, makes visible the work of human beings *in its various possibilities*, namely: in its *success* (as Aristotle shows in a painter whose object is the sublime), in its *mediocre* realisation (representation of the normal, ordinary human being) or in its *failure* (representation of the abject human being). Thus, the objects of art are the *possibilities* proper to human beings.

*The purpose of art: human possibilities*

For this reason, Aristotle places art close to philosophy and emphasises the difference between art and history. His argument goes as follows: art does *not* aim to represent *what is or has been*, but what *could* be. Everything that is or has been has an individual, particular character; it is linked to a specific time and place and is not universal. On the contrary, the *possible* is freed from the here and now and has a much greater scope.

For the historian and the poet do not differ in that one expresses himself in verse and the other in prose (for the work of Herodotus could be put into verse, but it would be the same kind of history in verse as in prose), but in this: that one tells *what has happened*, and the other *what might happen*. For this reason, poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. For poetry speaks rather of the *universal*, and history of the *particular*. 'Universal' is the kind of thing that a certain type of person should do or say according to what is plausible or necessary; this is what poetry aspires to, even if it then assigns proper names to the characters. 'Particular' is, for example, what Alcibiades did or what happened to him.

Thus, art no longer seeks (as in Plato) to expose human perfection, the *truth*, but rather to manifest the *possibilities* inherent in human beings. With this shift, art loses the binding character it had had until then; it no longer has to expose beauty in an *ontological* sense: its object is no longer the *real*, but rather the possible, *appearance*.

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18. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451 to 36 ff. [Spanish translation cited, pp. 50–51].

For Aristotle, *mimesis* and *miméisthai* do not mean 'to imitate', but rather 'to make evident', 'to manifest', 'to show'. But since it is not a question of showing the original entity in its binding character, *mýthos* (whose new function in art we have yet to demonstrate) no longer has the meaning of manifesting the *true*, but only of making human *possibilities* visible. Art definitively separates itself from ontology.

### *Dance as an artistic phenomenon*

According to Aristotle's definition, art is *μίμησις τῆς πράξεως*, and among the arts listed by Aristotle are (as we have already seen) dance and music. How can its means of configuration (rhythm) lead to artistic representation and be included in a *μίμησις τῆς πράξεως*?

Plato and Aristotle define rhythm as the order of movement.<sup>19</sup> The order of bodily movement produces dance; the order of syllables gives rise to poetic metre,<sup>20</sup> and together with voice and words produces song. Rhythm is thus understood as the root of poetry, music, dance, etc.

Rhythmic order refers to time. When and under what conditions does a rhythmic movement become *mimesis* and, therefore, art?

One might assume that any movement ordered in a "rhythm" must be understood as "imitation," since it represents slowness or speed, and in this sense it would already be *mimesis* and art. But there are also rhythmic movements performed by machines, and we do not understand them as "artistic" movements simply because they are a rhythmic order of time. Therefore,

What must a rhythmic order of movement refer to in order for us to understand it as artistic *mimesis*? Undoubtedly, it must refer to that time in which human *praxis*, that is, meaningful actions, are performed and become apparent. This means the following: the categories of time are the past, the future and the present; these appear with their existential meaning in relation to what 'concerns' human beings. Therefore, 'artistic' rhythm, as *μίμησις τῆς πράξεως*,

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19. Cf. Plato, *Laws*, 644 e; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1077 b 23; *Problemata*, V, 882 b 2.

20. Cf. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448 b 21; *Rhetoric*, 1408 b 27.

As a representation of human self-realisation, it is only that order of movement (of sounds, steps, etc.) that is determined by what concerns human beings and obtains its "meaning" here. Thus, the time to which movements refer in an 'artistic' rhythm is only that in which human action obtains its meaning, that is, that in which human action becomes evident in its realisation, or non-realisation, or no-longer-realisation. Movement, becoming, is a basic phenomenon of being: therefore, rhythm (the order of movement in relation to what gives meaning) can be understood as the original form of *μίμησις τῆς ἡράδωσος*, of art. If rhythm is *a re-presentation of the absolute* (Plato), we have sacred dance and sacred music; if, on the contrary, rhythm is only a representation of what *may concern* human beings, of human possibilities (Aristotle), we have profane dance, profane music and the separation of art and reality. Consequently, myth (which Aristotle considers the soul of *μίμησις τῆς ἡράδωσος*) is either the absolute itself (sacred meaning) or fable (profane meaning of myth), that is, only one of the many possible links that give meaning to human actions.

Does *mýthos* effectively mean, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, the unity that gives meaning to human actions?

*Beauty as consummate praxis in the pre-Platonic tradition. Myth as a sacred totality that gives meaning*

Both Plato and Aristotle expound on the essence of beauty in relation to the concept of *praxis*, which is not surprising, since this connection was already implicit in the pre-Platonic tradition (both in poets and philosophers, for example in Xenophon).

Let us mention Homer once again, who uses the term 'beautiful' to refer to objects, actions, attitudes and aspects of nature. On a higher level, beauty for Homer is something divine, perfect, which becomes evident. A sound can become beautiful if it indicates that a proposed goal has been achieved. In the *Odyssey* (XXI, 411), the sound produced by the vibration of Ulysses' bowstring is considered a 'beautiful song' because it is a sign that promises a strong future that will once again elevate the hero and frighten the suitors. The term

"Beautiful" also appears in relation to the house as property, as an indicator of the situation in which the regal man finds himself, the man who has reached the consummation of his possibilities (*praxis*), the goal that corresponds to him. Houses, properties, clothes are considered beautiful not for aesthetic reasons, but because they are part of a higher possibility of life: they elevate the owner to the sphere of *the complete exercise of his possibilities, of his fulfilment*.

Beauty does not touch on the subjective and pleasurable in a hedonistic sense; it is a distinctive feature of an orderly life that is close to the gods. Beauty heralds that form of superior objectivity through which human beings approach perfection: the Greeks called this sphere *praxis*. In any case, for Homer and Pindar, the display and pursuit of the ultimate goal of human beings is consummated in a mythical space; that is, the things, actions, and behaviours of human beings can be beautiful if they are related to the divine. Consequently, the possibilities vary: the same person may appear beautiful on one occasion thanks to divine influence, and ugly on another. Human *praxis* has its roots in the divine.

In pre-Aristotelian texts, the concept of beauty is very close to the concept of utility, that is, the use of something to achieve an end: something can be beautiful depending on how it is used, but not in relation to an isolated goal, but rather to the goal of human beings. The reference of human *praxis* to the gods leads *praxis* to the most objective, to consummation. Archetypal consummations occur when *praxis* delves into its primal forms: Plato calls this consummation 'ideas', which he considers beautiful when they become apparent in all their splendour.

In Homer and Pindar, human action, when directed towards a definitive goal and supported by the mandate of the gods, integrates the corresponding objects into the same sphere. In contrast, in Xenophon, the mythical-religious background has already disappeared:

–And beauty, could we define it in another way? Or, if it exists, do you call a body, a piece of furniture, or anything else that you know *is beautiful for everyone* beautiful?

–By Zeus! I certainly do not.

–So, according to the purpose for which each thing is useful, is its use beautiful for this purpose?

–Yes, certainly.

–According to that, is there anything *beautiful with respect to a purpose other than*  
 from that for which its use is beautiful?  
 –It is not in any other sense.  
 –So, is a useful thing beautiful in relation to what it is useful for?  
 –I believe so.<sup>21</sup>  
 –[...] in the same ways that men's bodies appear *beautiful and good*, in those same ways everything that men use is considered beautiful and good in relation to their *usefulness*.  
 –So a basket for carrying manure is also something beautiful?  
 –Yes, by Zeus! And a golden shield is ugly from the moment the basket is well made *for its use* and the shield is poorly made.<sup>22</sup>

A village is beautiful not because it looks pretty, but because it is useful: "It is clear that we must head for where we can find food, and I understand that there are beautiful villages no more than twenty stadia away."<sup>23</sup> Ports, and even dogs and horses, can also be considered beautiful from this "practical" point of view. And in this sense, it is possible to treat

"both beauty and wisdom [...] in a beautiful or ugly way."<sup>24</sup> This is linguistically established in the expression *ἰαλὸς ἡρός* ("beautiful for") and in the use of the dative *ἰαλὸς αὐτοῖς* ("beautiful for them"). Actions are "beautiful" if they are guided by an *ethos*: morally reprehensible actions cannot be considered "beautiful": "[...] you have stored in your souls the most beautiful and most propitious possession for war: praise brings you more joy than it does to other men, and it is necessary that those who love praise gladly take on every effort and every danger in order to obtain it."

of obtaining it."<sup>25</sup>

The *areté* that the ruler must practise also enables his subjects to appropriate the same virtue; the ruler makes

21. Xenophon, *Memories of Socrates*, IV, 6, 9 [Spanish translation by Juan Zaragoza in: Xenophon, *Memories of Socrates. Economic. Banquet. Apology of Socrates*, Madrid, Gredos, 1993, pp. 190-191].

22. *Ibid.*, III, 8, 5-6 [Spanish translation cited, p. 131].

23. Xenophon, *Anabasis*, III, 2, 34 [Spanish translation by Ramón Bach Pellicer in: Xenophon, *Anabasis*, Madrid, Gredos, 1982, p. 126].

24. Xenophon, *Memoirs of Socrates*, I, 6, 13 [Spanish translation cited (slightly modified), pp. 55–56].

25. Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, I, 5, 12 [Spanish translation by Ana Vegas Salvador in: Xenophon, *Cyropaedia*, Madrid, Gredos, 1987, p. 118].

possible in the community human *praxis*: "[...] the fact of knowing how to lead other men so that they have abundant resources and *are all as they should be* seemed to us then to be something truly admirable."<sup>(26)</sup>

The meaning of the Aristotelian term *praxis* goes, as we already know, far beyond the meaning of the concept of "action" as we understand it today. What we understand as pragmatic action is only one element of human self-realisation. Thought, on the one hand, and sensation or control of the passions, on the other, which Aristotle understands as the dianoetic capacity and ethical capacity of human beings, are only elements of human *praxis*. For Aristotle, philosophy and the evaluation of human action in relation to *ethos* reveal the various possibilities of human beings, that is, the success or failure of their work as human beings. Making this clear is the task of art.

The situation is completely different in Homer and in archaic poets such as Pindar. *Praxis*, human consummation, has its roots in the religious, in the sacred. If a person possesses certain abilities, they will shine through in their being, in their beauty, *thanks to the support of the gods*; this is a consequence of myth as *the original unity that gives meaning to human actions*.

If beauty in art is μίμησις τῆς πράξεως, that is, the manifestation of the meanings that things, actions and attitudes *may* have, the artist begins for the first time to be the spiritual mediator between the world and the subject, in the sense of a non-binding interpretation of reality. *Praxis* is no longer the consummation of the human being, which is designed by the divine and realised from the divine (Homer, Pindar), nor the consummation that has its roots in ideas as primal reality (Plato), but only the visualisation of a *possible realisation* of the human in its success or failure. Hence, in Aristotle, art is no longer directed towards the exposition of *what is* (or is not), but of *what "It could be."*

What does the term *mýthos* mean to Aristotle? How should we understand Aristotle's assertion in the first sentences of *Poetics* that we must know how to construct myths in order for a work to be beautiful?

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26. *Ibid.*, I, 6, 7 [Spanish translation cited, p. 123].

### *Myth as the main element of tragedy*

As is well known, the essence of tragedy contains six elements: a) the *λόσμος ὄφσως*, the setting, understood as the order of what is seen; b) the *μσλονοτία*, the musical, melodic and singing elements, which come together in the concept of *mélos*; c) linguistic expression (*λσί3τς*); d) characters (*ηθος*); e) thoughts (*δτάνοτα*); f) myth.<sup>27</sup> Two of these elements (linguistic expression and musical composition) form part of the *means* of tragedy, and one (the stage) forms part of the *mode* of *mimesis*, while the other three (myth, characters and thoughts) form part of the *object* of *mimesis*.<sup>28</sup> With this outline, Aristotle develops the first draft of *Poetics*, so that (as Aristotle says at the beginning) the work of art must be studied in relation to the *means*, *objects* and *mode of representation*.<sup>29</sup>

But isn't there a contradiction here with the assertion that the object of *mimesis* is *praxis*, whereas here *myth* appears in the foreground?

Aristotle expressly emphasises that *the most important* of the aforementioned elements is the *mýthos*: 'So that the events (*ωστς τσ νράωμστσ*), that is, the myth, constitute the end of the tragedy (*ὁ μύθοσ τσίλοσ τής τρσωμδίας*), and the end is the most important thing of all (*τὸ δς τσίλοσ μίωτστον ανάντων*).'<sup>30</sup> Later, Aristotle emphasises that *mythos* is the soul of tragedy: "Thus, myth is the beginning and, as it were, the soul of tragedy (*αρχή μσν ουν 1αί οιον ψυχή ὁ μύθοσ τής τρσωμδίας*)."<sup>31</sup>

Why does Aristotle say that the main element of tragedy is the *mýthos* and not the thoughts and characters? Why does he not mention *praxis*? When Aristotle states that the most important thing in drama is neither the way of thinking, nor the characters, nor the words, but rather the *mýthos*, this surprises us, as it seems to us that events arise above all from the way of thinking and the character of the protagonists, so that the *mýthos* could be understood as a result of these elements.

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27. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450 to 3.

28. *Ibid.*, 1450 to 10 ff.

29. *Ibid.*, 1447a 17.

30. *Ibid.*, 1450a 22 [Spanish translation cited (slightly modified), p. 46].

31. *Ibid.*, 1450 to 39 [Spanish translation cited (slightly modified), pp. 46-47].

But in reality, things are the other way around: a certain way of thinking and behaving gains its possible meaning in relation to what concerns human beings, in relation to what places them in a state of tension, not the other way around. Without *mythos*, neither modes of behaviour, nor thoughts, nor language would be recognisable in their human meaning; they would lack context and purpose. Thoughts and characters are not enough to construct a tragedy. Thus, *mythos* in art is the project of a tension that concerns human beings as performers and spectators. That is why Aristotle says that novice poets tend to choose characters and thoughts as the object of *mimesis*, not *mythos*, which is why their work is imperfect.

### *Art and life*

Here we see an essential analogy between life (reality) and works of art: in life, too, thoughts, behaviour, words, movements and passions only have meaning in the constant presence of *what concerns us*, of what confronts us with decisions, with fulfilled or disappointed expectations; it is this presence of tension in which the primal reality of our existence obtains its meaning, which we attempt to reveal through philosophy and to which we attempt to respond through ethical work in order to consummate the human. This primal tension also occurs in the work of art, but under a new, radically different sign: the essence of the primal tension through which thought, attitude, words and movements obtain their meaning is *not in the work of art as an object of knowledge and foundation* (and therefore it is not true), but only as an object of a 'possible' interpretation, and therefore is not binding: the order that thus emerges, the world, the *kósmos* of the work, is 'only' art, 'only' has emerged from the fantasy of an artist.

In summary: if the object of art is *praxis* and if *praxis* Humanity is represented in tragedy through people who act. If, moreover, the goal of art is to make human possibilities visible in their success or failure, then *mythos* (as *σούσταστώτων νραθμάτων*) becomes the project of a framework within which characters, thoughts, and words become visible *in their meaning*. That is why Aristotle says

that *myth* is the soul of tragedy. *Myth* brings together all actions and the existential meaning of objects, words and thoughts into a nexus that forms a whole: *myth becomes the totality that gives meaning to human actions.*

Having made these distinctions, let us now discuss what the framework of actions should be (νοίαν ττα δσί τ%ν σύστασβ σιβατ τωβ ηραυμάτωβ), since this is the *first* and most *important* element (ηρωτον 1αί μίθττβτον) of tragedy. We have already established that tragedy is the mimesis of a finished and complete action (τραυμ±δίαν τσλσίαζ 1αί όληζ ηρά3σωζ σινατ μίμηστυν) that has a certain length (σκούσηζ ττ μίμωσθοζ). [...] "Complete" is that which has a beginning, middle and end (όλον δέ ύστυν τò ύcov αργ%ν 1αί μίsson 1αί τσλsυτ»ν). "Beginning" is that which does not necessarily follow something else, while behind it something else occurs or happens naturally; "end", on the contrary, is that which necessarily or in most cases follows naturally from something else but without anything else happening after it [...]. Therefore, well-constructed myths must not begin or end at any point, but must adhere to the principles set out above.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Critique of doctrinal poetics*

For Aristotle, the essence of art coincides with μίμηστυζ τηζ ηρά3σωζ, and art is never about the application of external, technical means and forms. This must be emphasised in view of the misunderstandings that will arise later, for example in some Renaissance poetics.

It is true that people associate poetic creation with verse and call some poets elegiac and others epic; but they are called poets *not because of mimesis*, but because they have in common the fact that they write in verse. In fact, if someone publishes a work in verse on a medical or nature-related topic, they are usually called a poet. But *Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except verse*, so it is fair to call the former a poet and the latter a researcher of nature rather than a poet.

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32. *Ibid.*, 1450 b 21 [Spanish translation cited (slightly modified), p. 48].

33. *Ibid.*, 1447 b 13 [Spanish translation cited (slightly modified), p. 36].

Thus, a doctrine of metre does not help a poetic work to emerge. Aristotle therefore rejects methods of poetry that deal simply with the technique of metre. The same can be said of a doctrine of the use of colours or drawing: no one is an artist simply because they know how to mix colours or draw something well.

*Sound, voice, language. The word as mimesis*

Once we have interpreted the terms *mýthos*, *mimesis*, and *praxis*, we will finish by clarifying the essence of *mimesis* a little further with another example.

Aristotle says in *Rhetoric* (III, 1404 a 21) that *words* are μιμηματα. In what sense and in what way can a word be a *mimesis*? Is a word an imitation of objects or feelings when it 'designates' them? To reinforce our definition of the term *mimesis* not as 'imitation' but as 'manifestation', it is useful to study Aristotle's distinction between voice (φωνη) and sound (ψόφος).

Aristotle says: ψόφος (sound) is a mass of air in movement that reaches our ear (a physical-mechanical phenomenon, therefore), while φωνη is a movement of air configured by a living being as a *meaningful sound* or, as Aristotle says elsewhere, a meaningful sound connected with the imagination. In *De anima* we read: "Any object capable of setting in motion a mass of air that extends continuously to the ear is therefore sonorous (ψοφη-τιλόν)." And a few lines later: "The voice (φωνη) is a type of sound (ψόφος) exclusive to *animate* beings (σψύκου); 'it must necessarily be an animate being that produces the sound (δσί σψύκου σivat tò túnton), and this must be associated with some representation (μστα φαντασίας ττινός), since the voice is a *sound that has meaning* (σημαντιλός ψόφος)."<sup>34</sup>

Thus, sound differs from voice in that the latter derives its *meaning*, its *sense*, from a *living being*. For Aristotle, a living being is

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34. Aristotle, *De anima*, 420 a 3 ff., b 6 and b 31 ff. [Spanish translation by Tomás Calvo Martínez in: Aristóteles, *Acerca del alma*, Madrid, Gredos, 1978, pp. 196, 198 and 199].

All living things have a future, a process that *in itself* gives phenomena shape, form and meaning (svtsλáctá); the eye reacts to physical, mechanical and chemical stimuli with a *unique* reaction *specific to it*, with a visual phenomenon; the ear, with auditory perception. Thus, living beings (both at the vegetative and sensory levels) establish the type of reaction to stimuli; through the behaviour typical of living beings, stimuli obtain a specific delimitation, a form. The Greeks called what appears within limits síδoς, or also σσημα; therefore, we can say that living beings (at each of their levels) have within themselves the ideas, the patterns, the figures of what manifests itself.

If living beings use sound to serve *life* (thereby giving sound meaning, σσημσίον), sound becomes voice (φών). If the meaning it acquires is 'to flee', it becomes a warning sound; if it proclaims 'pleasure', it takes on the meaning of joy. In the animal world, sound becomes voice; for humans, animal voices become elements of *language* when they are produced in relation to *ideas* (the figures that give meaning and are *specific to humans*).

Thus, when Aristotle defines words as an expression of *mimesis*, it is clear that in this case too, *mimesis* does not mean the 'imitation' of the outside world, but rather the manifestation of *human interpretations* of objects, passions, attitudes, etc. Through words, as well as through colours, musical sounds, plastic values or movements, art provides *possible* interpretations of all the elements of our world, in relation to the success or failure of *human endeavour*.

### *The artistic myth*

The framework, the nexus in which these possible interpretations can be displayed, is the *mýthos*, which therefore means much more than 'fable'; for this concept of *mýthos* applies to all artistic genres, not just poetry. *Mythos*, as a totality that gives meaning, illuminates the phenomena in which we live and makes reality shine in its possible human meanings in relation to success and failure.

How should we understand the artistic project of *mythos* in concrete terms? We have seen that Aristotle defines a work of art as a whole that has parts: beginning, middle, and end (1450 b 22 ff.). The beginning is defined as that which comes after nothingness; the middle, as that which follows something and is followed by something else; the end, as that which is not followed by anything else. All this happens in time, whose elements are 'not yet', 'now' and 'no longer', which represent a tension and make it possible for us to pay attention to something and for memory and expectation to exist. What concerns us is this tension that causes the experience of time that prevails in the work of art. The artistic project of the nexus of tension, which Aristotle understands as *mýthos*, the totality of *praxis* (σύνθεσεν των ηραμμάτων, 1450 a 5), is a nexus of "fantasy", because (unlike in Plato) it does not represent the primal tension of being in which all elements of human existence obtain their real meaning, but rather a tension in which 'possible' human meanings become apparent. The fictional space of theatre, painting, dance, and musical composition that *mýthos* projects is qualitatively different from the space that surrounds us in everyday life and breaks its homogeneity. Through the projected *mýthos* (the totality that gives meaning), through the tension that springs from fantasy, the space and time of everyday life are nullified.

Thus, the possibilities offered to human beings in relation to their own work reveal human life and all the elements that form part of its realisation (insofar as they are the subject of art) caused by an original tension that gives meaning. The need to behave in one way or another (the assumption of character, *ethos*, and thought) arises when reality becomes apparent as an inescapable commitment. Understanding itself (thinking and speaking) is only possible within this tension. The artist's project of the nexus of tension, of the totality that gives meaning, is what Aristotle calls *mýthos*: *mýthos* as an essential element of art, more essential than language, way of thinking and character.

### 3. The separation of 'beauty' from 'being'

#### *Application of the concept of beauty to ontological fields*

In Aristotle's definitions of the work of art, we find the term 'beautiful' only at the beginning of *Poetics*, where he indicates how myths should be formed in order for the work to be 'beautiful'. This concept appears only a few times throughout the text (1452 a 10: ἀλλίου μύθους; 1452 a 32: ἀλλίστη δὲ ἀναμνῶρτος; 1453 to 12, 19, 23; 1453 b 25; 1461 to 4).

In *Poetics*, there is no explicit definition of beauty, but rather it is inferred from the interpretation of μίμησις νοη-τῆ. In chapter VII of *Poetics*, Aristotle, after emphasising that the object of a work of art must be an organic whole with a beginning, middle and end, says: 'Furthermore, since beauty, whether it be a living being (ζῶον) or any action composed of parts, must not only have these parts *in order*, but must also have a *size* that is not random—since beauty depends on *size* and *order* (ὅτι μὴ ἔστι καὶ τάξις σῶν), and therefore a living being cannot be beautiful if it is very small [...]'.<sup>35</sup> Thus, beauty consists in the correct ordering of the parts that form a whole, and with an appropriate size. It follows from this that in Aristotle the concept of 'beauty' is not only used in the context of poetics, of the phenomenon of art, but also in relation to ontological fields. Aristotle says in Book XIII of *Metaphysics* that the good and the beautiful are different, since the good must be sought in *praxis*, while the beautiful can also be found in immobile things.<sup>36</sup> And a little later Aristotle says: "the supreme forms of Beauty are *order, proportion and delimitation*, which the mathematical sciences manifest to the highest degree",<sup>37</sup> and these sciences have nothing to do with art. In *Rhetoric* (1361 b 7), Aristotle speaks of physical beauty, which he defines as ἀστέρας τοῦ σώματος, and says that it is different in the various ages of human beings. In *Topica* (I, 106 a 22), he also speaks of beauty in relation to living beings. In *Politics*, VII, 1326 a 33, it is said that social beauty consists of a relationship

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35. Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1450 b 34 ff. [Spanish translation cited, p. 48].

36. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1078 a 31.

37. *Ibid.*, 1078 a 36 [Spanish translation cited, p. 514].

determined relationship between the number of citizens and the size of the state. Limitation, as a determining aspect of beauty that corresponds to both the soul and the body, is mentioned in *Nicomachean Ethics* (IV, 1123 b 6). In several other places, Aristotle uses the adjective *ἰσότης* or the corresponding adverb without any aesthetic meaning (*Meteorology*, I, 352 a 7 and 11; *Politics*, IV, 1297 b 38; *Metaphysics*, I, 985 a 9, 989 b 27; *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1153 a 13).

The ontological meaning of beauty remains in Aristotle even in a field that we usually include in aesthetics, in art: architecture. We have already had occasion to point out that Plato also separates architecture from mimetic art (*Sophist*, 265 a). Since architecture mathematically realises beauty as order, symmetry and limitation, for Aristotle it is not the *mimesis* of a *praxis*, it is not a *τῆς ἐν μίμησιν*, but rather *ἀπεικαστική*, that is, architecture is an expression of ideal beauty, the visualisation of ontological beauty, which cannot be reproduced through art. Hence, the *Poetics* does not mention architecture, but it does mention painting, music, dance, etc. (cf. *Politics*, 1182 a 3).

#### *Order, symmetry and unity*

Beauty in the ontological sense, defined as order, symmetry and limited size, which in Aristotle lives *on alongside* the concept of beauty in art, has been so influential throughout Western tradition that even beauty in art has ended up being limited to these categories. Thus, the essence of Aristotle's theory of artistic beauty has been obscured and misunderstood. Order, symmetry and limited size are part of the ontological concept of beauty; they are categories of rationality and of the spiritual reality of the primordial being, of the ideal. They suppress the contradictory, the arbitrary and the disjointed, overcoming the chaos of the purely sensory and contingent. But with Aristotle, the artistic concept of beauty begins to separate from the ontological concept of beauty. We know that the core of the artistic concept is the project of totality of human *praxis* that becomes visible, that is, the *mythos* as a closed nexus that gives meaning to actions, attitudes, objects, words, etc.

Aristotle says that *mythos* must be a *whole* whose parts must appear in order in the sequence of beginning, middle and end and be of an appropriate size. This order and size should not be understood in an abstract way, but rather based on what is considered operative in poetry: the *mýthos* determines the unity and order of the parts; it is the framework in which everything that appears is shown in its form of being and in its articulation. We could say that νοίησις νοη-  
tt1» is based on an "idea" that cannot be understood in a purely rational way, but is rather that vision of the whole that manifests the possibilities of human beings and gives multiplicity a new form, articulating and ordering it. In this way, the work of art breaks (as we have seen) with everyday reality, in which *isolated* purposes and tasks, the impulses of passions, and theoretical questions do not allow for the possible unitary meaning of existence, which is the object of art. The order of the parts and the size of a work of art, its beauty, cannot be derived abstractly from any measurements and proportions.

The errors of traditional aesthetics in considering order, size and unity to be abstract laws, without questioning where they arise in the work of art, began in Hellenism and continued in the commentators of the Renaissance (Robortellus, Victorios, Castelvetro, etc.). In France, Corneille strictly subjected poetic creation to the laws that the then-young Italian movement had established.

#### *The problem of the poetic universal*

A similar misunderstanding arose when an attempt was made to define the essence of art through the thesis that *mimesis* refers to the poetic universal. The main support for this theory was found in the passage from *Poetics* (1450 to 16) which states that tragedy should not be a *mimesis* of people, but of *praxis*, and therefore of life in its *possibility* and not in its *reality*. This led to the assertion that the work of art has a much more universal character than history, which always refers to individual events. Aristotle also says (1451 b 5-15) that poetry strives to expose the universal, while history has the particular case as its object; in the work of art, the universal is

manifests itself in the laws of the possible and the necessary. Some interpreters concluded from this that the universal (that is, life in its ideal determinations, in its laws, free from all contingency) is the object of art. Therefore, the object of mimetic *poiesis* would be an ideality to which the whole reality of life would be immanent. These interpretations overlook the real problem and remain abstract and imprecise. That 'poetic universal' which must be the object of art will obtain its concrete meaning through the interpretation of *praxis* as the object of *mimesis*.

#### *Art as a testament to the human capacity to transcend*

Artistic *poiesis* is a special form of production in which *something new* (unity of matter and form, in Aristotelian terminology, οὐσία, the entity) emerges *from something* (matter) *through something* (form). When something is captured by artistic *poiesis*, it is determined by the transcendence inherent in art. The poetic *mýthos* (the artistic form of transcendence) makes clear in each case 'what needs to be ordered', the matter of the work as such, by rearticulating and reconfiguring it. As art manifests all 'possibilities', it bears witness to the human capacity for transcendence. In the words of Godofredo Iommi:

There is a trait in human beings that is always at work. It is the essence of the human condition: it consists of transcending the circumstances in which human beings find themselves at any given moment. No matter how we understand human beings, we can never deny this essential trait, for it is an element of their existence that uses reason and will to manifest and develop itself. In this act of transcendence lies the origin of singing and storytelling, of artistic expression, and its goal is to manifest the human capacity for transcendence.

#### *The change in the concept of art*

Aristotle's shift adopts several elements from Plato. In *The Republic* (392 c), Plato mentions three points of view for studying a work of art: the 'with what' (the means

of *mimesis*), the "what" (the object of *mimesis*) and the "how" (the forms of *mimesis*). For Plato, as for Aristotle, the object of *mimesis* is the *praxis* of better or worse men: 'And what then? Do we give credence to our previous statements when we said that rhythms and music in general are imitations of the ways of being of good and bad men, or what?'<sup>38</sup> Choral dances are imitations of ways of being: "Given that choral dances are imitations of behaviours that occur in actions, circumstances and characters of all kinds [...]"<sup>39</sup> However, unlike Aristotle, Plato only allows the *mimesis* of goodness, as only this leads to the manifestation of what *truly exists*. Plato excludes the representation of passions because they refer to something that is not real in an ontological sense.

On the contrary, Plato tolerates art if the mastery of passions makes the work of human beings evident; only in this way can passions be the object of *mimesis*. The artistic re-presentation (and the empathy it provokes) of passions is usually the opposite of rational behaviour:

When the best of us hear Homer or one of the tragic poets imitating a hero in the midst of affliction, prolonging their lamentations with long phrases, singing and beating their breasts, you know full well that we rejoice and, abandoning ourselves, we follow them with sympathy and warmly praise as a good poet the one who puts us in such a mood.

And now comes the criticism:

But when regret arises in us, realise that we take pride in the opposite, namely, in being able *to remain calm and endure* [...] But is this praise correct, when, upon seeing a man of such character that we ourselves would not accept, but rather would be ashamed of, we feel no abomination, but rather rejoice and praise him?<sup>40</sup>

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38. Plato, *Laws*, 798 d [Spanish translation by Francisco Lisi in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. IX, Madrid, Gredos, 1999, p. 29].

39. *Ibid.*, 655 d [Spanish translation by Francisco Lisi in: Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. VIII, Madrid, Gredos, 1999, p. 249].

40. Plato, *Republic*, 605 c-e [Spanish translation cited above, p. 474].

It is true that Plato had already defined art as μίμησις τῆς ἠράδου, but (as we know) in a completely different direction, which led him to criticise art: "Imitative poetry imitates, let us say, men who perform voluntary or forced actions, and who, as a result of these actions, believe themselves to be happy or unhappy; and who in all these cases lament or rejoice."<sup>41</sup> Thus, for Plato too, the *praxis* of human beings is the object of art, so that it becomes visible whether they are good or bad. But since for Plato "consummation" is the goal of human beings, Plato condemns art if this goal cannot be achieved through it. Art and artists are a danger to Plato, for by representing fluctuating possibilities, they excite passions that should be calmed. 'For [poetic imitation] nourishes and waters these things [the appetites of the soul], when they should be dried up, and makes them rulers over us, when they should obey us, so that we may become better and happier instead of worse and more miserable'.<sup>42</sup> How strongly Plato perceives art as a spur to the passions is clear from the following words:

Bear in mind that the part of the soul that we then forcibly repressed in personal misfortunes, the part that was hungry for tears and lamentations and sought to satisfy itself adequately (for it is in its nature to desire such things), that is the part that poets satisfy and delight; whereas that which is by nature the best in us, since it has not been sufficiently educated either by reason or by custom, loosens the vigilance of the complaining part, insofar as what it contemplates are the afflictions of others, and sees nothing shameful in praising and pitying another who, calling himself a good man, laments inappropriately, but rather considers that he derives a benefit from it, pleasure, and would not accept being deprived of it for having disdained the poem as a whole.<sup>43</sup>

Bringing to life the eternal, the mythical, what Plato philosophically understood as "idea" and which should also shine through in a work of art, is a task that Aristotle's aesthetics...

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41. *Ibid.*, 603 c [Spanish translation, p. 470].

42. *Ibid.*, 606 d [Spanish translation cited, pp. 475-476].

43. *Ibid.*, 606 a-b [Spanish translation cited, pp. 474-475].

teles cancels out. Art no longer addresses primal reality, and *mimesis* no longer makes the primal entity visible. In line with this change, the *mýthos*, which was an essential element of all types of artwork, is degraded to the project of a tension that is not necessarily true: to the meaning of the 'fabulous'.

In this way, *mimesis* becomes the representation of mere "possibilities" and is no longer the manifestation of what *commits* human beings. Art, *poiesis* through *mimesis*, becomes an expression of the individual possibilities of interpreting being in relation to human self-realisation. Beauty, which for Plato had ontological significance, takes on a new meaning: it becomes the artificial way of forming myths that show human possibilities and do not manifest anything binding or unconditionally real. Art is thus theoretically grounded as the field of aesthetics.

If the essence of human beings (who do not have a given world, but must construct it, which is a Platonic notion) includes consideration of the possibilities before which human beings must take a position in order to choose one of them, we must recognise that art shows us these possibilities. Therefore, art can still be attributed with educational significance, but no longer in the ethically binding manner of Plato.



## IV.HELLENISM AND LATE ANTIQUITY

### 1. Fundamental ontological feature of the theory of beauty in Antiquity

I begin with a few sentences from a lecture by Guido Kaschnitz:

Today we are accustomed to viewing the visual arts (painting and sculpture) as luxury items. We see them (assuming we have managed to establish contact with them) as a source of beautiful and stimulating thoughts and feelings, but the conviction that art is truly necessary for life is now held by only a few. [...] This aesthetic relationship with art, as it is often called, emerged relatively late and does not contain the original meaning that art has acquired in people's lives.<sup>1</sup>

Today, it is too easily forgotten that the arts and their works have religious origins, that their theoretical foundations were metaphysical in nature. In ancient times, art was not an end in itself, but a means of participating in a higher reality; and in all religious eras, among primitive peoples, in mythical times and in Hellenistic religious syncretism, as well as in the Christian Middle Ages, devotion was expressed in pictorial or sculptural works that made the primordial world visible, the absolute being beyond the apparent world. Aesthetic and subjective meanings were alien to them; their configuration had to correspond to eternal orders. Kaschnitz says in another lecture:

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1. Guido Kaschnitz von Weinberg, *Versuch einer Wesensbestimmung der antiken Kunst* [Kaschnitz lived from 1890 to 1958; he was an archaeologist and historian of ancient art].

Thus, the attitude of human beings observes in an extremely objective manner, states statically, and is determined to the end by divine laws. Human beings matter little as individuals, and they only have value through the laws of the heavens, which are reflected in them. They are subject to these laws, and the more this is expressed in their attitude and way of life, the better their life will be, in harmony with the cosmic order. Individual effort, rooted in personal passions and mystical impulses, lacks justification and meaning because it deviates from the universal norms of cosmic laws. The individual only has meaning as a limited part of the order. The order is God, and its representative on Earth is the human being, whose power encompasses everything.<sup>2</sup>

Plato valued art that is not a mimesis of the changing aspects of the sensible world (since this art would only be a derivative form of representation of the inessential and ephemeral), but rather art that is a representation of a higher, universal, immutable and therefore ahistorical reality, which contains the profound meaning of human existence. Hence, for Plato, *the form and content of beauty* cannot be separated in true art.

Aristotle himself, whom we have identified as the discoverer of aesthetics, says time and again that art cannot be a mimesis of the contingent. Precisely because art does not show things as they are, but as they could be, because it also exposes the plausible, the possible (unlike what Plato thought), and not merely the historical and real, art has a philosophical meaning for Aristotle, and to a much greater degree than history, which studies individual cases.

Certainly, we have emphasised the fact that Aristotle's theory of art marks the emergence of the aesthetic, subjective conception. The definition of art as a project of human possibilities through *mimesis* is incompatible with the ontological conception. However, this does not mean that Aristotle completely lost sight of the ontological task of art. The artist no longer has to expose (as in Plato) the truth, the original being, but rather *human* possibilities (which range from success, mediocre achievement and failure in human works) and, based on these, the human meaning of objects, situations, place and time, but Aristotle does not forget...

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2. Kaschnitz von Weinberg, *Sites and Artworks of the Agonal Idea*.

gives art its *cathartic, purifying* function. Anyone who comes into contact with a work of art, even if they are merely a 'spectator', contemplates human possibilities and their dangers, and in this way can achieve self-knowledge and purification. This cathartic meaning attributed to the work of art partly erases the purely aesthetic, non-binding nature of Aristotle's conception of art and beauty.

## **2. The pedagogical justification of art. Plutarch, Quintilian**

Anyone who has followed the development of art theory in antiquity up to Aristotle might expect late antique theories to be marked by the debate between the ontological and aesthetic conceptions. But this is not the case. Either the ontological meaning remains in the foreground, or issues are addressed that at first glance have nothing to do with a discussion between the Platonic and Aristotelian interpretations of beauty.

If we accept Aristotle's idea that art does not necessarily aim at truth and goodness in its content, we must also say that art and beauty do not essentially belong to being; art becomes a matter of form, of the presentation of content, and the artist's talent is purely formal. The decisive point of this conclusion is that content (the true and good) and form (the beautiful) are separated. If we are still concerned with the ontological meaning of art (and this concern remained alive throughout late antiquity), we must consider two serious problems:

Firstly, what constitutes the justification of art? And if we admit, in a hedonistic manner, that this justification consists in the pleasure of the creative act, in form, the second question arises: how can we put this pleasure at the service of truth and goodness, so that it becomes ontologically valuable again? Late Antiquity was still too convinced of the divine inspiration of art to definitively accept the theory of aestheticism. Late Antiquity's response to these two questions left its mark well into the Middle Ages and even in humanist theories of art. It goes like this: art must be approved if it can be attributed a meaning...

pedagogical. The enjoyment of the artist's creative activity and his way of representing things by virtue of his special talents should make *the truth more acceptable and accessible*.

This idea gave rise, for example, to the allegorical interpretation of poetic works by the Stoics, as well as, later, to the maxim with which Horace attempted to justify works of art:

"[...] but the one who combined the pleasant with the useful, delighting the reader and instructing him at the same time, took all the votes (*omne tulit punctum, qui miscuit utile dulci, lectorem delectando pariter-que monendo*)."<sup>3</sup>Centuries later, during Humanism and the Renaissance, this idea was resorted to almost out of desperation in a futile attempt to rid itself of aestheticism and defend art from religious and Christian reproaches.

With Chrysippus, the Stoic school began to interpret poetry allegorically; the oldest poets (Orpheus, Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod) are interpreted allegorically, and even the content of classical mythology is transformed into moral maxims, a method that the Church Fathers applied to Greek poetry with a fanaticism completely lacking in objectivity. Plutarch had already adopted a similar point of view towards poetry (in his early work *De audiendis poetis*, 14d - 37b, and in *The Banquet*, III, *Quaest.* 8, 2). The poet's task is to invent; neither metre, nor melody, nor song, nor the euphony of speech can exert the charm with which a *well-invented fable* captivates us, as is the case with the philosophical poems of Empedocles and Parmenides, who took only metre from the art of poetry (*De audiendis poetis*, 16 B; *De gloria Athen.*, 4, 347 E). The invention of *the mýthos* (which now means 'fable', no longer 'primordial reality') no longer even has the philosophical meaning that Aristotle had still attributed to it in the *Poetics*.

The pleasure of imitation now also derives from admiration for the spirit of the person who is capable of producing such artistic works (*Quaest.*, I, 2). Plutarch considers this pleasure to be a merit: it is spiritual pleasure that causes us such great satisfaction when we contemplate works of art that have been planned in such detail and crafted with such precision. But art and poetry can be dangerous if they consciously provoke in the

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3. Horace, *Ars poetica*, 343–344 [English translation by Joseph Morale-jo in: Horace, *Satires. Epistles. Ars poetica*, London, Gredos, 2008, p. 404].

contemplator and in the listener a deception (and the plausible is always more appealing than the true) and if they unconsciously spread false ideas, especially about the gods. For this reason, Plutarch warns against the great influence of poetry on the soul and the mind: evil, falsehood, and deception, presented in a pleasant manner, can confuse and exert a pernicious influence. If the dangers are detected, they can be avoided by making poetry devote itself solely to wisdom: "[...] poetry, receiving its arguments from philosophy and presenting them mixed with fables, offers young people a light and pleasant teaching. Therefore, those who are going to devote themselves to philosophy should not shy away from poetry, but should begin to philosophise in poetry, accustoming themselves to *seeking and loving what is useful in pleasure*, and if they do not succeed, to fighting and rejecting it. For this is the beginning of education."<sup>4</sup> If art forgets its ontological meaning, it is degraded to an empty and external form.

Quintilian expresses a similar view in the last book of his *Institutio oratoria*. There are people for whom the things they deal with become visions, fantasies, people who are capable of living with absent things. Those who are gifted with such a vivid imagination are artists (VI, 2, 29; VIII, 3, 61; XII, 10, 1 ff.): "What the Greeks call *fantasies* – let us call them visions, imaginations – through which representations of absent things become so vivid in our minds that it seems we are perceiving them with our own eyes and have them really before us: if anyone, I say, can grasp them perfectly, he will have supreme power in the manifestations of his affections."<sup>5</sup> This invocation of the passions must be *exclusively in the service of truth*.

### 3. Stoicism

#### *The ontological concept of beauty in Seneca*

A fundamental idea of a cosmic-religious nature is decisive for Stoicism and its theory of beauty and art. Plutarch, *Quomodo adulescens poetas audire debeat*, 15 F [Spanish translation cited, p. 93].

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4. Plutarch, *Quomodo adulescens poetas audire debeat*, 15 F [Spanish translation cited, p. 93].

5. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, VI, 2, 29 [Spanish translation by Alfonso Ortega Carmona in: M. F. Quintilian, *Sobre la formación del orador*, vol. II, Salamanca, Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1999, p. 337].

Beauty is the visibility of order, law and power in the universe. The movements of celestial bodies, the change from day to night, from summer to winter, take place in a predetermined order. The splendour of the universe is a reflection of the divine, of the absolute being. Human beings can only glimpse something of divine harmony by admiring it in the spectacle of the universe.

Thus, Seneca writes:

You are about to enter a city shared by gods and men, all-encompassing, bound by immutable and eternal laws, which causes the celestial bodies to revolve in their inexhaustible duties. There you will see countless stars shining, you will see that a single star fills everything, the sun, which marks the length of day and night with its daily course and distributes, even more accurately, that of summers and winters with its annual course. [...] You will see five stars that follow different trajectories and move in the opposite direction to the course of the firmament: the destinies of peoples depend on their slightest movements, and therefore the greatest and smallest things take shape according to whether a star has appeared favourable or unfavourable. [...] When, satisfied with the celestial spectacle, you lower your eyes to the earth, you will be attracted by a different and differently admirable aspect of things.<sup>6</sup>

And elsewhere we read:

All that is best for man is beyond human power: it cannot be given or taken away. This world, greater and better provided for than anything else created by nature, and the spirit, spectator and admirer of the world of which it is the most splendid part, are our perpetual property and will last with us as long as we last.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of human beings, beauty is also found in the exercise of their abilities and virtues, for it is in these that what is unique to human beings is realised: the spirit. Human beings are not capable of realising themselves in the purely sensory realm, which is why human beauty is not identical to sensory-physical beauty.

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6. Seneca, *Ad Marciam, de consolatione*, 18 [Spanish translation by Juan Mariné Isidro in: Seneca, *Dialogues (consolations to Marcia, his mother Helvia and Polybius)*. *Apocolocintosis*, Madrid, Gredos, 1996, p. 69].

7. Seneca, *Ad Helviam, de consolatione*, 8, 4-5 [Spanish translation by Juan Mariné Isidro in: Seneca, *Dialogues (consolations to Marcia, his mother Helvia and Polybius)*. *Apocolocintosis*, Madrid, Gredos, 1996, p. 101].

which Seneca often judges negatively (e.g., *Ep.* 117, 9; *Ad Marciam*, 17):

The best in each person should be that quality for which they are born and for which they are valued (*cui nascitur, quo censetur*). In men, What is the best thing? Reason (*ratio*): through it, humans surpass animals and closely follow the gods. Perfect reason is therefore their own good. They share the remaining qualities with animals and plants. [...] So if every being, when it brings its own good (*bonum*) to perfection (*perfectit*), is praiseworthy and reaches the end of its nature, if man's own good is reason, when man has brought it to perfection, he is praiseworthy and reaches the end of his nature (*finem naturae suae tetigit*). This perfect reason is called virtue and coincides with honesty. [...] If one possesses everything else: good health, wealth, a long lineage, a busy courtyard, but is unquestionably evil, you will reproach him. [...] A ship is not considered good because it is painted in exquisite colours, or because it has a silver or gold prow, [...] but because it is stable and solid, [...] fast and windproof. [...] Each thing is appreciated in relation to its intended purpose, and this corresponds to its specific quality.<sup>8</sup>

If beauty in nature is a reflection of order and law, of the unshakeable entity, and manifests itself to the senses, then human beings are entitled (in accordance with their spiritual nature) to another kind of beauty, one that is not sensory.

#### *Seneca's theory of art*

*Ars*, the Latin word for 'art', corresponds to the Greek term *téchne*, and therefore means conscious and informed production (ep. 29, 3). Thus, the problem of *ars* is not, in principle, that of the creation of the 'fine arts'. Seneca emphasises that human beings, in their relentless 'technical' effort to dominate nature, accommodate it in many ways to their whims, violate it, and thus distance themselves from it.<sup>9</sup>In this context, the concept of 'imitation' appears: 'All art is

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8. Seneca, *Ad Lucil.*, ep. 76, 8-14. [Spanish translation by Ismael Roca Meliá in: Seneca, *Moral Letters to Lucilius. I: Books I-IX, Letters 1-80*, Madrid, Gredos, 1986, pp. 449-450].

9. *Ibid.*, 90, 14; 91, 3, 6.

imitation of nature."<sup>10</sup> This "imitation" still does not refer to the fine arts at all; similar to how the universe arises from a divine act of creation (according to certain divine ideas; ep. 65, 3), human beings construct their own world and order with the help of their arts. But this happens with uncertainty and very often in opposition to the true nature of human beings; self-alienation is a possibility that constantly threatens them.

Seneca uses the *example* of the visual artist to develop the essence of production through *ars*, which is not the same as artistic creation. He draws on Aristotle when he says that four causes are necessary for a work to come into being: matter, author, form and purpose.

As you know, our Stoics assert that there are two principles in nature that give rise to all beings: cause and matter. Matter lies inert, a reality open to any mutation, which would be inactive if no one moved it; on the other hand, the cause, that is, reason (*causa autem, id est ratio*), shapes matter (*materiam format*), transforms it in the sense it wants; from it, it produces its various works. Therefore, there must be the principle *that* something is produced (*unde fiat aliquid*) and also the principle *that* produces it (*a quo fiat*): the former is the cause, the latter the matter. All art is an imitation of nature (*omnis ars natu-rae imitatio est*); therefore, what I said about the universe applies to the works that man sets out to accomplish. A statue requires both the material that is subjected to the sculptor's work and the sculptor who shapes the material. In the statue, the material was bronze, and the cause was the sculptor. This is the condition of all things: they consist of an element that is worked and the craftsman who works it.<sup>11</sup>

To these Plato adds a fifth [cause], the model (*exemplum*), which he calls "idea" (*ideam*); this is the model that the sculptor has before his eyes in order to achieve what he set out to do. But it matters not whether he has this model outside himself, to which he directs his gaze, or within himself, imagined and constituted by himself. A god has these models of all things within himself: with his mind he grasped the numerical proportions and the

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10. *Ibid.*, 65, 3 [Spanish translation cited, p. 359]; cf. Ernesto Grassi, *Kunst und Mythos*, Hamburg, 1957 [Spanish translation by Jorge Navarro Pérez: E. Grassi, *Arte y mito*, Barcelona, Anthropos, 2012].

11. *Ibid.*, ep. 65, 2-4 [Spanish translation cited, p. 359].

measures of everything that was to be created; it is full of those figures that Plato calls ideas, immortal, immutable, tireless.<sup>12</sup>

Seneca expounds this idea, which is valid for any creation, using the example of the creation of a work of art, and adds that the world was created in the same way:

The world, too, as Plato says, has all these causes: the maker (*facientem*), that is God; the element of which it is made, visible matter; the form, the arrangement and order of the world (*for-ma: est habitus et ordo mundi*), which we contemplate; the model (*exemplum*), undoubtedly the model according to which God realised the greatness of this beautiful work; the end, the motivation for his work.<sup>13</sup>

The "fine arts" must create in accordance with "ideas," primal figures that the artist contemplates within himself. In relation to the fine arts, Seneca distinguishes between ideas, the eternal images of all things (a purely Platonic notion), and *eidōs*. By transferring the idea, which is spatially and temporally outside the work of art, to his work, the artist forms an internally contemplated image (σιδοϛ), according to which he works:

The first is the model, the second is the form taken from the model and captured in the work; the first form is imitated by the artist, the second constitutes his work. The statue has a specific form; this is the *idos*. The model itself, which the sculptor imitated to create the statue, also has a specific form; this is the idea. There is yet another difference, if you wish: the *idos* is in the work, the idea is outside the work, and it is not only extrinsic to the work, but also prior to it.<sup>14</sup>

The *eidōs* within the artist provides autonomy, separates the work from the model, and transforms it into an appearance from which the original reality is removed, unattainable. The autonomy of subjective interpretation (the aesthetic) is the same as configuration and constitutes the essence of the fine arts. The Stoics reject the aesthetic because the artistic figure is something other than the eternal idea. In poetry, representation is separated from being, and poets (says Seneca) contribute nothing essential to the formation of the

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12. *Ibid.*, ep. 65, 7 [Spanish translation cited, p. 360].

13. *Ibid.*, ep. 65, 9 [Spanish translation cited, p. 361].

14. *Ibid.*, ep. 58, 21 [Spanish translation cited, p. 332].

human beings because they value beauty (separate from primal reality) more than truth. Seneca values 'beauty' negatively because it belongs to appearance. This idea of the separation between truth and beauty will later contribute to the thesis that poets only want to entertain and delight their readers. The 'fine' arts are the result of attractive configuration according to personal taste; they are a suggestive and external form: '[...] our Virgil, who did not seek to say things with great accuracy, but with great elegance, nor did he want to teach the peasants, but to entertain his readers'.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, it is not worth paying attention to the inventions of poets; for Seneca, listening to the fantastical destinies they invent is a waste of time, as it is much more important for each person to take charge of their own destiny. This criticism of poetry should not be understood as merely moralising; the figures of artists are only 'fantastic' images with no reference to truth because primal reality and the fine arts have become separated:

Do you want to know where Ulysses wandered, rather than teach us how to avoid always making mistakes? We do not have time to hear whether he was buffeted by the waves between Italy and Sicily or beyond the known lands (because such a long journey could not have taken place in such a small space): the storms of the soul shake us every day and wickedness pushes us towards all the misfortunes of Ulysses.<sup>16</sup>

For the stoic, what the poet provides us with is little more than nonsense; stories without purpose or meaning. The enjoyment of poetry is reprehensible because listeners "do not seek to rid themselves of any vice, nor to learn any rule of life with which to improve their habits, but rather to enjoy the delight of their ears".<sup>17</sup> Art is an external form, a beautiful wrapping that can only be detrimental to essential content: "Style is the adornment of the soul: if it is polished, groomed and artificial, it shows that the soul is also insincere and somewhat weakened".<sup>18</sup>

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15. *Ibid.*, ep. 86, 15 [Spanish translation by Ismael Roca Meliá in: Seneca, *Moral Letters to Lucilius. II: Books X-XX and XXII, Letters 81-125*, Madrid, Gredos, 1989, p. 74].

16. *Ibid.*, ep. 88, 7 [Spanish translation cited, p. 92].

17. *Ibid.*, ep. 108, 6 [Spanish translation cited, p. 297].

18. *Ibid.*, ep. 115, 2 [Spanish translation cited, p. 353].

Seneca's repeated violent attacks on art owners stem from this conviction. Not even music is spared, as it too lacks ontological meaning: "those who have listened to a concert carry in their ears the melody and sweetness of the song, which hinders reasoning and prevents them from applying themselves to serious matters".<sup>19</sup> The new fact has conquered supremacy: profane art as an end in itself (the aesthetic) has appeared; art no longer represents the original, and as a mere form it must be condemned. Stoicism rejects art because it no longer fulfils any ontological task.

It may seem surprising that Seneca should oppose the trend of his time so strongly, when aesthetics were flourishing in works of art. But the development of art and theories about art follow separate paths. Once mythical art had come to an end and its religious significance had disappeared, secular art and subjective interpretations of reality emerged. Representation became spectacle; the work was no longer the voice of the divine, but a possible interpretation of the world and the divine.

#### 4. Cicero

##### *The concept of the 'natural feeling' of beauty*

Benedetto Croce attempted to find anticipations of modern aesthetics in Cicero and Philostratus' concept of fantasy. Of course, this attempt is futile and absurd, and in general it is inappropriate to examine the theories of beauty in Antiquity from the point of view of modern aesthetic ideas and judge them to be naïve, crude or false because they contradict aestheticism.

As is well known, Cicero did not expound his theory of art and beauty in a specific book; his statements on this subject are scattered throughout his writings, and the most important ones are found in *Orator* and *De oratore*. There he expressly states that beauty cannot be grasped by the senses: things that powerfully attract the senses are not beautiful (*De oratore*, III, 98, 100): 'What do the senses judge? Whether something is sweet or bitter, smooth or rough, near or far, immobile or

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19. *Ibid.*, ep. 123, 9 [Spanish translation cited, p. 415].

in motion, square or round."<sup>20</sup>Sensory perception is relative and does not offer certainty to judgement. In *De finibus* (I, 22 ff.), Cicero criticises Epicurus' theory because it makes the senses the judges of things. Cicero rejects the hedonistic conception of art and beauty, for which he takes up Stoic motifs; as there, the basis of his criticism is the separation between content (truth) and form (the external, subjective configuration) in the 'beautiful' work. Beauty belongs to form, so that pleasure and fascination become the goal of art. Rejecting this attitude, Cicero writes ironically: 'Do you think that Homer, Archilochus, Pindar, or even Phidias, Polykleitos, and Zeuxis directed their artistic activity towards delight?'<sup>(21)</sup>

Cicero is aware of the difficulty of finding criteria for beauty and artistic creation, and in developing this problem in the context of oratory, he speaks of a "natural feeling" as the basis for judgement. This "natural feeling" has been interpreted as a concept of individual aesthetic judgement. However, to understand the real meaning of this concept, a passage from *Orator* is very important: 'For the ear, *or the soul*, warned by the ear, contains within itself a kind of *natural measure* of all sounds (*ures enim vel animus aurium nuntio naturalem quandam in se continet vocum omnium mentionem*).'<sup>22</sup> To understand this sentence, we must bear in mind that for Cicero, the ear is a tool of the soul; the soul is primary, as it is the principle of life that determines the meaning of phenomena. In other words, life itself has the criterion according to which phenomena obtain their meaning, so that the root of their *natural measure and feeling* lies in *the soul*. If, for Cicero, the soul is not only the principle of sensory interpretation of phenomena in human beings, but also confers spiritual meaning on them, it also has the *natural faculty of spiritual order and the measure of things*. Cicero writes in *Orator*: "For even verse itself is not known rationally, but *in a natural way and*

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20. Cicero, *De finibus*, II, 36 [Spanish translation by Víctor-José Herrero Llorente in: Cicero, *Del supremo bien y del supremo mal*, Madrid, Gredos, 1987, p. 120].

21. *Ibid.*, II, 115 [Spanish translation cited above, p. 170].

22. Cicero, *Orator*, 177 [Spanish translation (slightly modified) by E. Sánchez Salor in: Cicero, *The Orator*, Madrid, Alianza, 1991, p. 123].

*with the senses*, to which the calculation of the measure has later explained what has happened."<sup>(23)</sup>

### *Beauty and utility*

Cicero follows the Platonic tradition when he says that the order and measure of human interpretation of phenomena are images, figures, ideas that are not subject to change and are the absolute criterion that makes change recognisable. Thus, the artist's process of imitation is not directed at the sensually perceptible object or the human configuration, but at the form of things, which Plato called 'idea'. For Cicero, the figures according to which the artist creates *by looking within himself* are primal and objective figures of being, *not subjective aesthetic interpretations of the things of reality*:

In any case, I maintain that in no genre is there anything so beautiful that it is not surpassed by that from which it is taken, as one takes a portrait, so to speak, of a face; *that cannot be perceived by the eyes, nor by the ears, nor by any sense; we can only comprehend it with our thoughts and minds (quod neque oculis neque auribus neque ullo sensu percipi posset, cogitatione tantum et mente complectimur)*. Thus, we can imagine works more beautiful than the statues of Phidias, more perfect than which we see nothing in the art of sculpture, and than the paintings I have mentioned; and this despite the fact that when that artist created his model of Jupiter or Minerva, he had no one before his eyes to serve as a model (*e quo similitudinem duceret*), but rather it was in his own mind that there was a kind of extraordinary image of beauty (*sed ipsius in mente incidebat species pulchritudine eximia quaedam*), contemplating which and fixing his gaze on it, he directed his art and his hand towards its imitation. [...] Plato calls these forms of things 'ideas' [...] and says that they are not engendered; he affirms that they have always existed and are contained in our reason and intelligence; other things are born, die, flow, pass and do not remain long in a single state.<sup>24</sup>

The work arises from the relentless effort to reproduce the model, and this is not a question of technical ability, but above all of

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23. *Ibid.*, 183 [Spanish translation, p. 126].

24. *Ibid.*, 8-10 [Spanish translation cited, pp. 34-35].

A constant comparison between the model and the work, which has the meaning of an inner conversation and an inner examination. Cicero is Platonic in the sense that, for him, ideas act on the human spirit and retain their original objectivity, and therefore have an ontological character. In Cicero, there are no traces of the aestheticist thesis that the image is a subjective interpretation of the human spirit, since the 'natural feeling' of beauty is not (as we have seen) subjective at all, but rather that in beauty, that is, in the splendour and attraction of the objective, form and content constitute an ontological unity.

This idea is at the heart of Cicero's doctrine on inspiration:

My personal opinion is that not even the most famous and illustrious arts are exempt from divine power, so I cannot believe that a poet can compose a solemn and accomplished poem without divine inspiration from his mind. [...] As for philosophy, the mother of all arts, what else is it but, as Plato says, a gift, or as I maintain, a discovery of the gods? [...] it is philosophy that has dispersed the fog of the soul, as if snatching it from our eyes, so that we can see all things: those above, those below, the first, the last and those in between. This force that produces so many and such important effects seems to me truly divine.<sup>25</sup>

Since beauty reveals being, and being manifests itself in limits, measure and order, beauty is presented as having both purpose and meaning. Therefore, beauty is useful and usefulness is beautiful: "[...] nature itself has, in an incredible way, managed in many things to ensure that what is most useful also has great dignity and often charm as well."<sup>(26)</sup>

This is why the term *pulchritudo*, which is usually translated as 'beauty', has a very broad meaning in Cicero: it refers to the useful and pleasant properties of an object, and Cicero uses it in the context of both craftsmanship and spirituality, as well as in the ethical sphere (*Tusc.*, V, 61; *De nat. deor.*, I, 26; *De fin.*, I, 42).

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25. Cicero, *Tusculanae*, I, 64 [Spanish translation by Alberto Medina González in: Cicero, *Disputaciones tusculanas*, Madrid, Gredos, 2005, pp. 157–158].

26. Cicero, *De oratore*, III, 178 [Spanish translation by José Javier Iso in: Cicero, *On the Orator*, Madrid, Gredos, 2002, p. 461].

The thesis that Cicero establishes in *De officiis*: "*Venustas et pulchritudo corporis secerni non potest a valetudine*" ("grace and beauty of the body cannot be separated from health"),<sup>27</sup> applies not only to the contemplation of nature, but to everything that human beings create properly:

What is there in a ship that is as necessary as its sides, its frames, its bow, its stern, its antennas, its masts? And yet they have a charm when you look at them, as if they were designed not only for safety, but also for pleasure. Columns support temples and porticos; however, they serve no purpose other than appearance. It was not grace, but necessity that built the eaves of the Capitol roof and those of other temples.<sup>28</sup>

## 5. Philostratus. Theory of artistic fantasy

Following on from Cicero's ideas, we must mention the theory of beauty and art by Philostratus II (the author of *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, *Images* and *Epistles*).<sup>29</sup> This author was originally from Lemnos, left Athens for Rome and belonged to the circle of Empress Julia Domna. His *Epistles* addressed to her reveal his special position in this exclusive circle. After the deaths of Caracalla and his mother, the circle dissolved, and Philostratus left Rome. He returned to Athens, where he died.

It is often said that Philostratus glorified the artist's subjective imagination as the source of works of art. For example, Benedetto Croce mentions him as one of the first representatives of the modern 'aesthetic' conception of art. In reality, Philostratus emphasises the significance of imagination in relation to the origin and essence of art, and gives it primacy over mimesis. In *Images*, he states that when judging a painting, it is of little use to praise its truth, since the essential thing in art is 'invention'. The spiritual expression, for example, that an artist places in the

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27. Cicero, *De officiis*, I, 95 [Spanish translation by José Guillén Cabañero in: Cicero, *Sobre los deberes*, Madrid, Tecnos, 1989, p. 50].

28. Cicero, *De oratore*, III, 180 [Spanish translation cited, p. 462].

29. On the various Philostratuses and the attribution of their writings, see *Realencyclopädie*, XX, I, 194; 136-174. A different attribution is proposed by Gerth, "Zweite Sophistik", nos. 212-214, *Realencyclopädie*, suppl. VIII, pp. 764-765.

gesture and figure spring from inventiveness (that is, from fantasy) rather than imitation.

To understand the true meaning of this doctrine and avoid misunderstandings, one must read Apollonius' discussion with Tespe-sión, the oldest of the Ethiopian gymnosophists in Egypt. They discuss sculpture in Greece and Egypt, as well as the question of whether Phidias and Praxiteles ascended to heaven and studied the figures of the gods there in order to reproduce them in their sculptures, or whether these have another origin:

"So, according to that," argued Tespe-sión, "after ascending to heaven and making moulds of the figures of the gods, Phidias and Praxiteles reproduced them through their art, or was there something else that led them to mould them?"

"Something else," replied Apollonius, "something full of wisdom, moreover.

"And what was that?" he insisted. "For you could say nothing else but imitation."

"They are the work of *imagination*," he explained, "a craftsmanship more skilful than imitation. For imitation will do its work from what it has seen, but imagination will do its work even from what *it has not seen*, for it will conceive it by reference to what exists. And while imitation is often shaken by astonishment, imagination is not, for it moves fearlessly towards what it itself has conceived."<sup>30</sup>

These sentences proclaim – as was said – an essential motif of modern aesthetics: the subjective nature of creative artistic activity. But for Philostratus, the origin of fantasy lies in the vision of ideas, although he recognises its capacity to choose and condense. Zeus is presented in his role as a celestial god, in relation to the sky, the seasons and the stars; Athena represents intelligence and art. The function of fantasy is not subjective or aesthetic. Philostratus's supremacy of fantasy over mimesis has been seen as a criticism of Aristotelian ideas. But this attack on mimesis presupposes an erroneous interpretation of the Aristotelian concept, as if it referred to the reproduction of something physically present. But we know that Aristotelian mimesis refers to a project that does not correspond to any 'reality', let alone a 'physical presence'.

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30. Philostratus, *Vita Ap.*, VI, 19 [English translation by Alberto Bernabé Pajares in: Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, London, Gredos, 1979, p. 366].

In Philostratus' theory of art, it is essential to establish an analogy between the artist's creative process and the processes of understanding and judgement of the viewer and the critic. The viewer must possess the capacity for mimesis and imagination, and this must be evident in their praise and enthusiasm (*Vita*, II, 22).

## 6. Vitruvius

Vitruvius' treatise *De architectura* is not a theory of beauty per se, but in our context we must mention some of his views. We have already explained how Pythagorean philosophers understood the essence of beauty and beautiful works religiously and metaphysically through a mathematical theory of proportions and measurements. The metaphysical foundation was lost as a result of the decline of Pythagorean philosophy of numbers; Vitruvius' theory of architecture is influenced by mathematical principles that go back to the Pythagorean source and represent a last attempt to give his work ontological meaning.

According to Vitruvius, the training of an architect mainly involves two fundamental elements. The first is practice (*fabrica*), understood as reflective experience (*usus meditatio*) that requires a material from which the work will emerge in accordance with a purpose: 'Practice is the performance of a continuous and routine activity carried out with the hands, using any type of material that may be necessary, in accordance with a project represented in a plan (*fabrica est continuata ac tri-ta usus meditatio, qua manibus perficitur e materia cuiuscumque generis opus [est] ad propositum deformationis*).'<sup>31</sup>

The second element is the accurate representation of the goal to be achieved, according to which the material will be organised; it arises from *ratiocinatio*, from theory: "But it is theory that can demonstrate and explain the works carried out in accordance with skill and resources (*ratiocinatio autem est, quae res fabricatas solertiae ac rationis proportione demonstrare atque explicare potest*)".<sup>32</sup>

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31. Vitruvius, *De architectura*, I, I, 1 [Spanish translation by Francisco Manzanero Cano in: Vitruvius, *Arquitectura. Libros I-V*, Madrid, Gredos, 2008, pp. 130–131].

32. *Ibid.* [Spanish translation cited, p. 131].

The spiritual preparation of the architect, which is the prerequisite for construction, rests on broad knowledge: the architect must master style, must know how to draw, must have studied geometry, optics, arithmetic, history and philosophy, as well as medicine, music, law and astronomy.

As we know, for the Pythagoreans, mathematics contained the essence of nature and art. In ancient times, symmetry was a numerical relationship, the mathematical concept of the rational and commensurable, two concepts through which the formless was given a mathematically calculated limit, a shape. The first doctrine of symmetry has come down to us in the form of a few sentences by Polykleitos, who, according to Galen and Philon of Alexandria, said: 'Beauty resides not in the symmetry of the elements, but in that of the parts [...]. And certainly the beauty of the body [...] lies in the symmetry of the parts',<sup>33</sup> "success comes after many numerical relationships by a small one".<sup>34</sup> Vitruvius mentions that the Greeks

always adhered to his buildings to mathematical measurements, and refers (VII, preface, 12) to the writings of Ictinus and Carpinus on the Parthenon, to Philo's work on the symmetry of temples, to Silenus' work on the Doric temple and to Arcesius' work on the Corinthian temple. The basic measure of proportion was the *embátes* ('shoe', IV, III, 3). The human creator must proceed in his works in a manner similar to nature, which carries out its creations according to completely determined proportions and measurements. Vitruvius derives the perfect system of measurements in architecture from the parts of the human body and their proportions; the face, for example, from the chin to the hairline, constitutes one-tenth of the length of the body. All limbs have "specific proportions of commensuration, which notable painters and sculptors of antiquity also applied, reaping great and enduring praise".<sup>35</sup>

The units of measurement, which are obviously essential in any work, were derived by the ancients from parts of the body – such as the finger, the palm, the foot and the elbow – and divided into the perfect number, which the Greeks called *téleos*. The ancients established the number

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33. Polykleitos, fr. Diels-Kranz A 3 (Galen) [Spanish translation cited].

34. Polykleitos, fr. Diels-Kranz B 2 (Philo Mechanicus) [Spanish translation cited].

35. Vitruvius, *De architectura*, III, I, 2 [Spanish translation cited, p. 296].

which is called "ten"; and, in reality, it was inferred from the hands, by the total number of fingers.<sup>36</sup>

From this, Vitruvius derives the ideal of architectural work:

Therefore, if we accept that measurements were discovered based on the extremities of the human body and that there is a correspondence in the commensuration of the separate limbs with respect to the figure of the body as a whole, we can only admire those builders who, even when erecting temples to the immortal gods, arranged the members of their works in such a way that their distributions were harmonious in proportions and symmetries, both separately and as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

The relationship between architectural measurements and human measurements (which has been established by objective nature) is, for Vitruvius, the fundamental principle of beauty in buildings: "For no temple can have a structural system without symmetry and proportion if it does not have, as in the case of a well-formed man, a precise system of relationships between its members (*nisi uti hominis bene figurati membrorum habuerit exactam rationem*)."<sup>38</sup>

## 7. Horace

### *Poetry and fantasy at the origin of human community*

We have seen that late antique theorists of beauty wondered how to deal with the dangers of aestheticism, how art could address goals that lay outside itself. This question is often linked to Horace's thesis: 'Poets aim either to be useful or to entertain (*aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poe-tae*)'.<sup>39</sup> But Horace's contribution to art theory is not limited to this thesis.

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36. *Ibid.*, III, I, 5 [Spanish translation cited, p. 298].

37. *Ibid.*, III, I, 9 [Spanish translation cited, p. 303].

38. *Ibid.*, III, I, 1 [Spanish translation cited, p. 295].

39. Horace, *Ars poetica*, 333 [Spanish translation cited, p. 403].

For Horace, the essence of art certainly lies in mimesis, but not in the Aristotelian sense of the concept. The object of mimesis is neither human possibilities nor possible interpretations of things in relation to human existence (the non-binding aesthetic), nor Platonic ideas, the primordial reality, but rather, for Horace, mimesis is directed at nature, at the visible reality of perceptible things. Therefore, a work is not successful if it makes the viewer laugh because it contradicts nature. Nature is the artist's domain, and it sets the limits, since everything that nature encompasses has its own essence that the artist must know and respect. His freedom refers only to how to bring together the aspects that nature provides him with; the example of Greek antiquity must always be present in the artistic consciousness. *Imitatio* must shed new light on what has already been represented; it cannot be a repetition, just as a tree produces new leaves every year (AP, 60). Tradition, a historical factor, therefore becomes an essential element in the definition of art. The imitation of nature must go hand in hand with the imitation of historical models. The Greeks are the model because, according to Horace, they were the first to show how to form a word. Of course, imitating them does not mean blindly repeating their works, but rather that these works must teach us how to fulfil the requirement of seeing and reproducing nature in its original form.

But Horace's most characteristic ideas are not found in these theories, but rather on a typically Latin-Roman principle. At the beginning of *Ars poetica*, Horace places painting alongside poetry, studying art as a whole. But the first verses do not contain (as we might expect) a definition of art, but rather refer to the effect that a failed work provokes: 'Will you, my friends, hold back your laughter? (*risum teneatis, amici?*)'.<sup>40</sup> Understood as the formation of a material (and giving form is to expose the possibilities of nature), art cannot be an end in itself, but must be viewed above all *in terms of its effect on human beings*. What consequences follow from this?

Naturally, when faced with the phrase '*Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poetae*', one must first ask what exactly is meant by *prodesse*. Through the muses, art has a relationship with the

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40. *Ibid.*, 5 [Spanish translation cited, p. 383].

divine, confers an original order upon chaos. That is why ancient poets were called *vates* (visionaries, prophets) (AP, 24; *Odes*, III, 1). Orpheus and the first singers brought order to existence (AP, 392) and founded the community: 'Thus honour and fame came to the divine vates and their poems (*sic honor et nomen divinis vatibus atque carminibus venit*)'.<sup>41</sup> Art does not expose ideas, being, as other theories of antiquity claimed, but is at the service of the *human community*, at the origin of historical existence, of human action, of history. This does not begin with the arbitrariness of a despot, but *with the ordering action of the poet*.

The true *prodesse* of art refers to the unfolding of the human; when a work is successful, *delectare* also occurs. Moral *utilitates*, *virtutes*, have their origin in the *poets'* reference to the divine, since they were the founders of the human order, as they were at the service of a social, historical task (*Ep.*, II, 1, 119). As the poet's word founds the community and is addressed to the community, it must be accurate and understandable. The artist must transport readers, listeners or viewers to that state of mind in which they welcome the words and make them their own; then, the reward for the work achieved will also be admiration.

The distinctive features of the right word, alive, are *grace* and *honour*. The listener must be moved: 'It is not enough for poems to be beautiful: they must have charm and carry the reader's spirit wherever they please (*Non satis est pulchra esse poemata: dul-cia sunt / Et quocumque volent animum auditoris agunto*)'.<sup>42</sup> The poet must know the whole nature of human beings, including their passions, the irrational and all the nuances of emotions, in order to be able to influence them. As the poet knows the causes of moods, he can adapt his work to specific situations; in this way, he also exercises a social and historical activity. Art is close to oratory, which also requires knowledge of the passions in order to direct them in a given situation (AP, 103). By participating in life and suffering, poetry participates in history. Under these conditions, art will hardly pursue purely aesthetic goals. It is not enough for it to *simulate* its object; it must also *pretend*, that is, possess the ability to influence the public, its passions.

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41. *Ibid.*, 400 [Spanish translation cited, p. 407].

42. *Ibid.*, 99 [Spanish translation cited, p. 390].

In this way, Horace projects (incidentally) for the first time in Latin tradition those ideas that would later be taken up by Humanism, and especially by G. B. Vico (1668-1744). According to Vico, the first rudiments of human history are found in the work of poets, who, through the gift of imagination, open up the perspective of the divine to human beings. This led to the clearing of forests and created the first human place. The altar (*ara*) is originally, as Vico says, the cleared forest, the sacred place where the first 'theological' poets founded human communities and tended the sacred fire. It is clear that 'the first peoples of the pagan world, out of a demonstrated natural necessity, were poets'.<sup>43</sup> 'The first sages of the Greek world were the poet-theologians'.<sup>44</sup> In Horace, as in Vico, the objectivity of art no longer rests... lies not in the communication of metaphysical ideas, but in its ability to shape history. That is why Vico called his philosophy a "new science": its object is no longer being, but the becoming of human beings, their history.

## 8. The last ontological interpretation of art in Antiquity

### *Plotinus*

It was Plotinus who, in late antiquity, gave the greatest depth to ontological thought in the field of art and beauty. His starting point is the well-known dualism of matter and form: *matter* is the unlimited, the formless, the hidden, the inexplicable, the principle of darkness; *form* is the configurator, the differentiator, the principle of manifestation, which Plotinus identifies with beauty. The manifestation of being, the *parousia*, is the definition of beauty: 'The beauty of colour is simple because of its conformation and its predominance over the darkness of matter due to the presence (παρουσία) of light, which is incorporeal and is reason and form'.<sup>45</sup>

Knowledge of beauty through the senses occurs by comparing what is perceived sensorially with the idea, with the figure that

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43. G. B. Vico, *Scienza nuova*, introduction [Spanish translation by Rocío de la Villa in: Giambattista Vico, *Ciencia nueva*, Madrid, Tecnos, 1995, p. 66].

44. *Ibid.*, principle 44 [Spanish translation cited, p. 131].

45. Plotinus, *En.*, I, 6, 3 [Spanish translation by Jesús Igal in: Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, and Plotinus, *Enneads I-II*, Madrid, Gredos, 1992, p. 280].

Human beings carry this within themselves: they remember it in order to judge (in the same way that we use a ruler to check whether something is straight). Plotinus clarifies this with an example. The knowledge of beauty in what is given to the senses is similar to the judgement of an architect who compares the house he has built with his inner idea of the house and comes to the conclusion that it is beautiful (*En.*, I, 6, 3). 'Beauty is mainly found in the realm of sight. But it also occurs in the realm of hearing [...]. And if, abandoning sensory perception, we continue upwards, we also have beautiful occupations, actions and habits, beautiful sciences and the beauty of virtues.'<sup>(46)</sup>

The ideas according to which human beings order and shape their world manifest themselves in the soul and spirit. Knowledge of higher, non-sensory beauty originally takes place in the soul, which is capable of contemplating and applying it: "But it is necessary to contemplate such beauties with what the soul sees them with and, upon seeing them, to feel a pleasure, a jolt, a commotion much more intense than when seeing the previous [sensory] beauties, like those who are already in contact with real beauties."<sup>(47)</sup>

The passions that arise when contemplating beauty are: wonder, fear, happy surprise, desire, love. Wonder at contemplating the primal forms of being, for they are unusual. Fear, because they take us out of everyday life and into the inhospitable. Happy surprise, desire, and love, because in this impulse towards beauty we achieve perfection. When human beings try to shape their lives in accordance with the figures, forms, and ideas that their spirit discovers, they are complying with the laws of beauty.

What draws the gaze to beauty and makes us enjoy beauty is form; the soul knows and affirms beauty because it is itself form and manifestation of reality (*En.*, I, 6, 2). When the soul receives the impression of formlessness, of ugliness, it rejects it, for it does not find its principles there, it cannot adapt to formlessness. The soul enjoys the vision of what belongs to its species, derives it from itself and perceives itself there. Here there is a clear analogy with the corresponding passages in Plato's *Phaedrus* (250 a) and *Symposium* (209 b). The idea, the objective of the soul, orders the multiple, causes unity and coordinates the parts among themselves; this ordering principle is transferred from the cam-

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46. *Ibid.*, I, 6, 1 [Spanish translation cited, p. 275].

47. *Ibid.*, I, 6, 4 [Spanish translation cited, p. 282].

po of knowledge to the field of human action, which then shines forth in beauty. Plotinus also preserves the Platonic distinction between imitative art (in relation to ideas) and purely productive art, such as architecture (*En.*, V, 2).

If beauty is identical to form (and this means, in Plotinus, to the manifestation of being), art, in whose works the ideas seen take shape, is *poiesis*, ontological action and supreme creation. Through art, that which is not, that which has no form, that which is obscure, is led to being, to manifestation. The artist's work becomes the ontological act of creation.

A stone, for example, has its own shape and therefore possesses a natural beauty; but the sculptor gives it a new form, the shape of a higher reality (not a subjective or relative reality, but a spiritual reality). Through this act, art transforms and ennobles nature; the value of the work of art in relation to the natural material used by the artist is a consequence of the higher spiritual world that manifests itself in the artist. Admiration of the work of art means veneration of the spirit that appears, that is visually displayed.

*The task of the poet. The essay 'On the Sublime'.*

What do the dignity and commitment of the poet consist of? The essay *On the Sublime*, originally attributed to Longinus, provides insight into this question. The word *sublime* refers to the style of speaking and writing (*De sublimitate*, I, 3). Nature has its own laws, but it is not without rules, so rules for art can be derived from the most accomplished works. The sublime work cannot be left to its own devices, but needs the reins and spurs of critics (II, 1, 2).

The concept of the 'sublime' also appears in other writings from Antiquity; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example, uses it to refer to a particular poetic foot (*De comp. verb.*, XVII, 107). Dion of Prusa (Chrysostom) begins his discourse on beauty (*Or.*, 21) by emphasising how tall (ὑψηλόζ) and handsome a young man is, and it is unclear whether he is referring to physical stature or spiritual elevation. In Pseudo-Longinus, the term definitively acquires an existential meaning.

The sublime, he says, is not linked to passions in general (since some are far removed from the sublime), but is related to a specific type of *noble passion* (VIII, 2, 4). The word sublime is not a matter for artists who use artificial tricks,<sup>48</sup> but arises from the emotion of *superior* human beings: only they direct their words not only to what *may* be, but to what *is*. The word sublime presupposes the sublime human being, who has attained his own perfection.

The sublime, says Pseudo-Longinus, elevates the soul, fills it with joy; the soul believes it has done what it perceives, and this removes resistance (VIII, 2, 3):

For sublime language leads those who hear it not to persuasion, but to ecstasy (σῆς ὑπέροχον αἴσθ). For everywhere the marvellous, which is accompanied by wonder, is always superior to persuasion and to what is merely pleasant. But if the act of persuasion depends mostly on us, the qualities of the sublime, however, which give discourse an invincible power and force, completely dominate the listener. Experience in invention, skill in the order and arrangement of material are not evident in one or two passages, but we see them emerge with effort from the total fabric of the discourse. The sublime, used at the right moment, pulverises all things like lightning and shows in the blink of an eye and in its entirety the powers of the orator.<sup>49</sup>

The nature of human beings who speak a sublime language or create sublime works is superior mentality: "That is why, sometimes, even a naked, voiceless thought, on its own, because of the greatness of its content, causes admiration [...]. For it is not possible for those who have had low and slave-like habits and thoughts all their lives to accomplish anything worthy of admiration and the esteem of posterity."<sup>(50)</sup>

The original and desirable unity of word and life (which the current reaction against aestheticism, which we have discussed

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48. On the difference between 'artistic' and 'artificial', see E. Grassi, *Kunst und Mythos* [Spanish translation cited above, pp. 52-56].

49. Pseudo-Longinus, *De sublimitate*, I, 4 [Spanish translation by José García López in: Demetrio, *Sobre el estilo*, y Longino, *Sobre lo sublime*, Madrid, Gredos, 1979, p. 149].

50. *Ibid.*, IX, 2 and 3 [Spanish translation cited above, p. 160].

at the beginning, he reiterates) is strongly emphasised here. The sublime is the *objective*, and this is stated in a manner very similar to how Aristotle speaks of the universality and necessity of the principle of identity as the foundation of objective statement (*Metaphysics*, Book IV). In the essay *On the Sublime*, we read: 'For when people of different customs, lives, tastes, ages and ways of thinking have a *unanimous opinion about the same thing*, then this judgement and coincidence of such diverse minds is a sure and unquestionable guarantee in favour of what they admire'.<sup>51</sup>

A work that can be considered 'sublime' corresponds to the highest spiritual level of an existential whole, guaranteeing a complete human being. In *On the Sublime*, there are no pedagogical or moralising intentions that approach the work of art from the outside (such as those of the Stoics and Cicero). A work is successful if it springs from a complete human being, and its sublimity is nourished by *eros*, the impulse towards the higher that forms the profound essence of the human being. This *eros* causes the sublime; it belongs to the transcendental world that engages the human being. The position defended here again, in late antiquity, is decidedly the Platonic position.

What, then, did those divine spirits see that, in seeking the most sublime in the art of writing, they disregarded accuracy in detail? They saw, among many other things, this: that nature has not chosen man for a low and ignoble way of life, but rather, introducing us into life and the entire universe as if into a great festival, so that we might be spectators of all its trials and ardent competitors, has instilled in our souls from the beginning an invincible love for all that is great and, in relation to us, supernatural. For this reason, the entire universe is not enough for the impetus of human contemplation and thought, but very often our thoughts abandon the boundaries of the world around us, and if one could look around at life and see how greatly it participates in everything extraordinary, great and beautiful, one would immediately know why we were born.<sup>52</sup>

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51. *Ibid.*, VII, 4 [Spanish translation cited, p. 158].

52. *Ibid.*, XXXV, 2-3 [Spanish translation cited, pp. 202-203].

## CONCLUSION

### **Ontological thought and poetic technique**

Antiquity interpreted beauty time and again in a mythical, sacred or transcendental sense. Understood ontologically, beauty opens and directs the gaze, bringing the object into view. The lover carries within himself the image (σιδος) of his beloved. Carrying within oneself the primal image is what defines art, for the inner image leads the artist to the work. Even in Plotinus, the productive experience of beauty (expressed in artistic creation) is interpreted as a level of the mystery of the union of God and soul. Dion of Prusa presents in *Olympic Discourse* No. 12, 44-47, the visual artist as *a herald of the divine on Earth* alongside the poet and the legislator:

For no sculptor or painter will be able to represent intelligence or wisdom in themselves. And this is because no one is capable of seeing or investigating them at all. And this is not a mere suspicion, but because we know how these beliefs have arisen, we resort to the same thing, that is, we attribute *to God* a human body as the seat of sanity and reason. And in the absence of a more appropriate model, we try to reflect the invisible and the unrepresentable through something that can be represented and seen. We make use *of the value of the symbol* [...]. But that man – Homer – who *stood out above all others for the beauty, majesty and magnificence* of his works, he was indeed practically the best creator of statues of gods.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Dion of Prusa, *Olympic Discourses*, XII, 59 [Spanish translation by Gonzalo del Cerro Calderón in: Dion of Prusa, *Discourses XII-XXXV*, Madrid, Gredos, 1989, pp. 36-37].

All of Antiquity is animated by the desire to manifest in art and in the representation of beauty the original, the binding natural principle, the divine. Philo of Alexandria says of the sculptor Phidias that he created his works from bronze, ivory, gold and other materials and that in all of them he manifested the same thing, as any layman can see:

Just as nature often uses the same mark on twins to imprint almost exact similarities, so too does perfect art, imitation and imprint of nature, when it gathers different materials, model and imprint the same form on all of them, so that through it the productions become relatives, sisters, twins.<sup>2</sup>

However, as we have seen, two traditions have come down to us from antiquity: the ontological conception of beauty (in pre-Platonic thought, Platonism and Neoplatonism) and the Aristotelian conception with the discovery of aesthetics, which has had a decisive influence on the aesthetic theories of the modern age.

At this point, two limiting observations should be made. We have said that late antiquity (contrary to what might be expected) did not establish a debate between the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions. The predominant Platonic trend led to repeated attempts to justify poetry *pedagogically* in opposition to autonomous art. But it must be borne in mind that this pedagogical assessment of art and beauty is only possible where artistic production *has already become an autonomous poiesis and techne*, where it has already been presented as something 'deceptive' and therefore dangerous. The search for pedagogical meaning is based on Aristotelian motives through which beauty and art were freed from their mythical, religious and ontological ties.

The second observation refers to a fact that we cannot study here: Aristotelian influences are to be found less in the theories of beauty we have discussed than in the "technical" guidelines for writing poetry. The practical teachings on poetic technique by Horace, Juvenal and even Virgil reflect the tradition of Aristotle's conception...

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2. Philo of Alexandria, *De ebrietate*, 90 [Spanish translation by Lena Balzaretto in: Philo of Alexandria, *Complete Works*, vol. II, Madrid, Trotta, 2010, p. 438].

art as a *poietiké techné* that uses words and rhythms to produce an *imaginary* world. We have not discussed this history of practical poetics because it is outside the scope of our approach, but it would be very interesting to follow this line of thought, as these poetics (with all their subtleties) must be understood as a consequence of Aristotle's thesis that all *poiesis* forms part of *techné*. Conscious technical knowledge as the task of the poet is related to the origin of 'pure poetry' and 'pure painting', so that Mallarmé and Valéry can find their theoretical justification in Aristotle.

However, treatises on beauty in late antiquity do not address this problem, but rather give priority to the didactic meaning of beauty as a philosophical question. The entire style of theoretical discussions is guided by educational viewpoints. This is why medieval schools, philosophical theory on beauty, and poetic guidelines for the production of artistic works subsequently coexisted.

Thus, in late antiquity, the discussion of beauty in its Aristotelian tradition *was not continued by philosophers, but by poets, and not in a philosophical manner, but in the form of reflection on poetic technique itself*. Moreover, this corresponds to Aristotle's requirement that in *téchne*, the competent judges are the technicians themselves.

This fact is too broad a topic to be studied here. We will only point out that the modern "technical" trend that dates back to Aristotle has led to the great theorists of "pure poetry". For Aristotle himself, the spirit can create something that has never existed and that does not need to have examples in the world of phenomena. Thus, the abandonment by poetry and art of all impressions, affects and experiences is partly a consequence of the Aristotelian idea that *téchne* and *poiesis* are a peculiar knowledge with which the spirit creates. *Poiesis* in the Aristotelian sense is a genesis in which the *éidos* is at the beginning, 'in the soul', as it is expressly stated. Therefore, the investigation of the theory of beauty in late antiquity could be placed under the perspective of poetic theory, since in these technical indications the beauty of poetry is separated (or 'hypostasised', according to Plotinus) as something that is beautiful in itself. Plotinus' position is ambiguous from this point of view. On the one hand, he is decidedly under the influence of the Platonic tradition.

Greek tonic; on the other hand, it succumbs to the strong tendency of its time towards internalisation.

From a philosophical point of view, late antique authors value the understanding of the technical in a didactic and pedagogical sense as exercise, *institutio*, to attain truth; the rhetorical point of view is placed above the technical and poetic aspects of art.

Our research shows that in ancient times, the theory of art and beauty in general referred to broader and deeper values than those referred to as 'aesthetic', leaving behind the subjective and individual aspects that we always see connected to aesthetics. We believe this fact helps to shed light on certain issues that concern us today.

It has rightly been pointed out that works of art are present as objects, but not as works of art until we make them 'awaken' and 'speak'. Certainly, the interpreter must ascertain the external reality of the works, but his task begins once he has established the original 'text'. If certain movements in contemporary art decisively reject the aesthetic that was always the goal of artistic endeavour in the Modern Age, then *interpretation* must also *take new paths*. Our task is not to determine what art criticism should be in this change of ideas; the curious analogy that exists (albeit in completely different contexts) between the ancient philosophy of beauty and essential trends of the present seems to us significant enough to show it once again at the end of our journey in a few examples.

### **From appearance to reality. Dadaism and surrealism**

"Dada" was not a movement of "artists," and its participants were not content with simply overcoming aestheticism. What they wanted was to provocatively bring people back into contact with full reality. Georges Hugnet writes: "Dada refuses to propose any kind of aesthetic, because aesthetics always means an absence of attitude towards life and is an end in itself. Dada was never artistic, but rather a state of mind."<sup>3</sup>

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3. R. Motherwell, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, New York, 1951.

Dadaism arose from rebellion, from despair in the face of the unbridgeable gulf between the artist and the person, and between reality and society. It demanded an attitude towards life: "As long as prayers are recited in schools in the form of text explanations and museum tours, we will denounce despotism and seek ways to disrupt the ceremony. [...] *A priori*, in the fields of painting and literature, it would be ridiculous to expect a Dada masterpiece."<sup>4</sup>Dadaism does not seek to blindly deny or proclaim total absurdity, but rather rebels against specialised activities that operate in apparent worlds and distance us from reality:

The word *dada* symbolises the most primitive relationship with the reality that surrounds us [...]. Life appears as a simultaneous confusion of noises, colours and spiritual rhythms that is resolutely integrated into Dadaist art [...] with all its brutal reality. Here is the clearly defined boundary that separates Dadaism from all previous artistic styles [...]. *For the first time, Dadaism no longer confronts life aesthetically.*<sup>5</sup>

For surrealism, which we have already mentioned in the Introduction, art means seeking and finding absolute reality.<sup>6</sup>It understands the unconscious as an essential source of creation, as a hitherto unnoticed field of human life and artistic production that must be explored through dreams, 'automatic writing' and other practices in order to access primal reality.

### **The unity of the arts and life. The Bauhaus**

The Bauhaus pedagogy sought to bridge the gap between the world of "beauty" and reality, to liberate art from its aesthetic isolation and place it back in the midst of reality.

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4. A. Breton, *For Dada*, in: Motherwell, *op. cit.*, p. 203 [Spanish translation by Miguel Veyrat in: André Breton, *Los pasos perdidos*, Madrid, Alianza, 2003, pp. 56 and 57].

5. Hülsenbeck, *Collective Dada Manifesto*, 1920 [Spanish translation by Anton Dieterich in: R. Huelsenbeck (ed.), *Almanaque Dadá*, Madrid, Tecnos, 1992, p. 31].

6. See A. Breton, *Les manifestes du Surréalisme*, Paris, 1946; *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, Paris, 1928; *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, Paris, 1947.

Teaching was very varied, seeking to establish a close connection between art, craftsmanship and technique; the concept of beauty is linked to that of functionality, designating an essential feature of the *finished* work. This idea is similar to ancient (non-aesthetic) ideas and contrasts with the usual aesthetics of the Modern Age:

There is no such thing as 'professional art'. There is no essential difference between the artist and the craftsman. [...] The favour of heaven means that in rare moments of inspiration that do not depend on our will, art emerges unconsciously from the work of our hands, but the craftsmanship is essential for every artist. That is the source of creative configuration. Let us therefore form a new guild of artisans without the classist arrogance that sought to erect a haughty wall between the artisan and the artist. Let us desire, imagine, and create together the new edifice of the future, which will be all at once: architecture, sculpture, and painting, rising from millions of artisans' hands toward the heavens and serving as the crystalline symbol of a new faith.<sup>7</sup>

Gropius' educational plan, which encompassed all fields of design from painting to urban planning, was intended to foster teamwork among craftsmen, technicians and artists, and (far from any aestheticising intention) to fuse the creative imagination of the artist with the modern technical-industrial world of work. Architecture regained its supremacy over the other arts, once again becoming (in the sense of the Greek word) the first art.

"leader". The building is more important than the parts, than the individual work; a living relationship with reality must be established, above all through the collaboration of all artists in shaping people's places of residence and work; and "only those who master the process of life as masters in the working community will be masters of works".<sup>8</sup>

The best way to measure the level of a culture is the way in which an anonymous mass gets "in shape" and becomes a human community. According to the "Bauhaus idea", the arts, led by architecture, should come together in an organic whole that gains meaning and significance through active life. The architect has to listen to modern life,

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7. Walter Gropius, first manifesto of the Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar, 1919, reproduced in: *Bauhaus 1919 bis 1928*, Stuttgart, 1955, p. 16.

8. Gropius in: *Bauhaus. Zeitschrift für Gestaltung*, 4, p. 8.

with its social, technical and psychological data, must attempt to understand its internal laws and develop its forms of configuration from there. "In this way, the external forms of modern architecture do not spring from the whims of architects thirsty for novelty, but are a result of the conditions of our time."<sup>9</sup>

### **Transcending the apparent world. The Blue Rider, Kandinsky**

The artists of The Blue Rider felt united in a community whose fundamental sentiment was described by Franz Marc as...

[...] the nostalgia for indivisibility, the desire to free ourselves from the sensory deception of our ephemeral lives. [...] What we expect from 'abstract art' is the attempt to make the world itself speak [that is, objective, absolute reality], rather than our soul moved by the world [that is, the subjective]. [...] Appearance is always flat, but set it aside, set it aside completely, far from your spirit—continue to think of yourselves together with your image of the world—and the world will remain in its true form, the form that we artists sense.<sup>10</sup>

Paul Klee said in his famous lecture in Jena in 1924:

Rise above the Model [that is, the external phenomenal world] to the Matrix! Impostors, those artists who quickly become immobilised along the way. But chosen are those who go further, towards the original Law, to some proximity to the secret source that feeds all evolution. That place where the central organ of all movement in space and time, which we call the heart or brain of creation, animates all functions.

Who would not want to establish their home there as an artist? In the bosom of nature, in the primordial depths of creation where the key to everything lies buried? [...] The Impressionists,

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9. Gropius, "Ein Weg zur Einheit künstlerischer Gestaltung", published in an exhibition catalogue and reprinted in: Müller-Blaser, *Gestaltung*, Frankfurt, 1952.

10. Quoted in W. Hess, *op. cit.*, p. 79 [Spanish translation, p. 111].

Our antipodes of yesterday were entirely justified in settling at ground level, among the shoots of everyday roots, in the undergrowth where appearances are born. But our beating heart drives us deeper, always sinking us towards the original depths.<sup>11</sup>

Particularly interesting are Kandinsky's statements, which deal with nothing less than the theoretical foundations of an ontological definition of art. Kandinsky rejects all forms of aestheticism, all reproduction of nature through the 'imitation' of its aspects: 'Today, the viewer [...] seeks in a work of art a pure imitation of nature that serves practical purposes (the portrait in its common sense, etc.), or an imitation of nature that contains a certain interpretation ('impressionist' painting) or, finally, moods disguised as natural forms (what is called 'emotion').'<sup>12</sup> Impressionist painting, with its problems of light and air, does not interest Kandinsky because it does not break with subjective appearance. For Kandinsky, art and nature are two separate realms. The mistake of modern masters was precisely to want to represent, achieve, interpret one of these realms (nature) through the other (art as subjective interpretation).<sup>13</sup>

If art does not seek to imitate or interpret nature, what is its task? The first primordial element of painting is colour: 'Even as a young man, I felt the unusual expressive power of colour. I envied musicians for being able to make art without having to 'narrate' anything 'realistic'. However, it seemed to me that colour was just as expressive and powerful as sound.'<sup>14</sup> This fascination with colour should not be misunderstood.

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11. First published under the title *Über die moderne Kunst*, Berna, 1945; reprinted in: P. Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, Basel and Stuttgart, 1956, p. 93 [Spanish translation by Hugo Acevedo in: P. Klee, *Teoría del arte moderno*, Buenos Aires, Calden, 1976, pp. 50–51].

12. Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, Munich, 1912, p. 23 [Spanish translation by Genoveva Dieterich in: V. Kandinsky, *De lo espiritual en el arte*, Barcelona, Paidós, 1996, p. 22].

13. Kandinsky, *Rückblick 1901–1913*, Baden-Baden, 1955, p. 27; on this and the following, see W. Hess, 'Die Grosse Abstraktion und die Grosse Realistik (Kandinsky)', in: *Jahrbuch für Ästhetik*, V, 1960, pp. 7 ff.

14. Kandinsky, *Essays über Kunst und Künstler*, Stuttgart, 1955, p. 208 [Spanish translation by Thomas Schilling in: V. Kandinsky, *Escritos sobre arte y artistas*, Madrid, Síntesis, 2002, p. 193].

as an aesthetic fascination: "The beauty of colour and form is not (despite what aestheticians and naturalists, who seek primarily 'beauty', claim) a sufficient objective for art."<sup>15</sup> Capturing a primal element such as colour, which is the exclusive property of painting, must lead to *reality*, to the inner meaning of primal nature, in order for the painter's work to be real. Seeking this reality in the external phenomenal world was a mistake. Each colour has an effect on the soul that shapes its meaning. From this we must derive the "inner need" of painting.

In general, colour is a means of exerting a direct influence on the soul. Colour is the key. The eye is the hammer. The soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand that, by pressing this or that key, makes the human soul vibrate appropriately. The harmony of colours must be based solely on the principle of proper contact with the human soul. We will call this basis the principle of inner necessity.<sup>16</sup>

It would be a misunderstanding to assume that Kandinsky is referring to "inner necessity" to a subjective (in this sense, "inner") or aesthetic element. The artist creates those necessary forms that are in harmony with *primal reality* or with the cosmos; the "external" is the multiplicity of things, which conceals the unity of what underlies them, of the "internal": "Anyone who delves into the hidden treasures of their art is an enviable collaborator in the construction of the spiritual pyramid that will one day reach the sky."<sup>17</sup> Here, '*to the sky*' means the original objective, absolute nature; for the soul itself, in which the spiritual meaning of colours is manifested, is a level of primordial nature; what painting produces is something *real* with which the artist is connected through the spirit with the *primordial force of nature*.

The problem of colour is only one aspect of painting. Colours, which no longer need to be sustained by the copying of objects and have a deeper meaning in themselves than the objects themselves, demand a reordering in the painting, a 'composition' without objects:

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15. Kandinsky, *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, p. 82 [Spanish translation, p. 90].

16. *Ibid.*, p. 64 [Spanish translation cited, p. 54].

17. *Ibid.*, p. 56 [Spanish translation cited, p. 48].

Now I was certain: the object was damaging my paintings. A terrifying abyss, a profusion of questions of all kinds, in which my responsibility was at stake, presented itself to my mind. The most important of these questions was: with what could I replace the missing object? The danger of ornamental art became clear to me: the dead, illusory existence of stylised forms could only repel me. [...] Only one thing consoles me: I never resolved to use a form that had been born in me through logic rather than pure sensitivity. I did not know how to invent forms, and I am repulsed by invented forms. All the forms I used always came 'by themselves'.<sup>18</sup>

Just as colours have an 'inner' meaning, according to Kandinsky, shapes have an 'inner sound' which, for him, became increasingly essential to composition:

I believe that geometric boundaries give colour a greater possibility of provoking pure vibration than the boundaries of any object, which always speak in a more intrusive and restrictive way, because they provoke an emotion specific to them (horse, goose, cloud...). Geometric or free boundaries, which do not depend on an object, evoke emotions that are less defined than those of an object, just like colours. They are freer, more elastic, 'more abstract'. Their abstract form has neither a belly, like a horse, nor a beak, like a goose. When one wants to subject a plastic idea to an object, one usually has to change and restrict its natural limits.<sup>19</sup>

A triangle painted yellow, a circle painted blue, a square painted green, another triangle painted green, a circle painted yellow, a square painted blue, etc., are all totally different entities that act in completely different ways. Certain colours are enhanced by certain shapes and mitigated by others. In any case, sharp colours have greater qualitative resonance in sharp shapes (e.g. yellow in a triangle). In colours that tend towards depth, the effect is accentuated by round shapes (e.g. blue in a circle).<sup>20</sup>

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18. Kandinsky, *Rückblick*, p. 21 [Spanish translation by Alcira Nélica Bixio in: W. Kandinsky, *Mirada retrospectiva y otros textos 1912-1922*, Buenos Aires, Emecé, 2002, pp. 110-111].

19. Kandinsky, *Essays on Art and Artists*, p. 156 [Spanish translation, p. 152].

20. Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 68 [Spanish translation, p. 58].

Kandinsky's complex critique of the object is motivated by the need to overcome appearance in art, the unreal in which we move during everyday life and which is determined by the practical and the functional. Kandinsky believes he has discovered what is truly real in what he calls the 'inner sound' of things and the 'abstract elements' of artistic composition. Kandinsky believes that ontologically determined *objective* art is possible and describes with prophetic foresight what artists such as De Chirico and some surrealists will later achieve. Thus, the concepts of 'great abstraction' and

"Great realism" and "great abstraction" are interchangeable for him (this is the main subject of the aforementioned article by W. Hess); for "abstraction" does not mean "to abstract", it is not a process of simplifying the images of things that preserves the image of nature in its fundamental features. That would only be an impoverishment of everyday reality. The everyday world, or "practical-functional" world, as Kandinsky calls it, is a world of appearances that must be broken because it conceals objective reality. That is why Kandinsky rightly says that his abstraction is at the same time "great realism". For him, art is neither an interpretation nor an abstraction of the outside world, as both would remain in the realm of the aesthetic, attached to the inessential object. What the painter does when he seeks the 'inner sound' is a process that in its intention coincides with the ontological concept of beauty in ancient philosophy.

The fact that Kandinsky often refers to music should not be historically derived from early Romanticism, for example, nor should it be explained by the artist's strong synesthetic nature. Music is abstract in essence, but (in Kandinsky's terminology) as an expression of the absolute being, it is a "great realism."

Kandinsky wants to discover through art a new 'real' world that arises from the spirit and shows human beings as spiritual beings in their objective reality:

For some time now, attempts have been made (I did so before the war) to replace "abstract" with "absolute". In reality, this does not represent any improvement. The best name would be, in my opinion, 'real art', because it is an art that adds a new artistic world, of a spiritual nature, to the outside world; a world that can only

can be born of art. It is a real world. In any case, the old name "abstract art" has already become widespread.

For Kandinsky, this is a progression from the sensory to the spiritual that requires us to stop copying external things. In everyday life, the human imagination forms objects from observed natural phenomena that are simply the means to achieve human ends: reifications, re-cuts that are necessary to make practical use of nature. Primordial nature, as manifested through the human spirit in art, has nothing to do with the nature that human beings reify in their practical actions.

These ideas are very reminiscent, even though they arise from completely different conditions, of motifs from pre-Platonic and Platonic philosophy: external nature as a world of shadows, as appearance; art is accepted only insofar as it does not imitate this world of shadows, but rather manifests the primordial spiritual reality. And also in the light of late antique philosophy (beauty as an expression of the primordial cosmic being) can the thinking of today's artists be contemplated.

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21. Kandinsky, *Essays on Art and Artists*, p. 172 [Spanish translation, p. 168].

## TEXTS

Xenophon

Plato Cicero

Horace

Vitruvius

Seneca

Plutarch

Pseudo-Longinus

Lucian

Philostratus

Plotinus

## PRELIMINARY NOTE

Every anthology is unsatisfactory and, in general, misleading. Compilations of text excerpts, so popular today, often give the illusion that they provide knowledge in a convenient way. The texts reproduced below can only be understood in the context and from the perspective of the preceding research; in each text we indicate the corresponding section of our book. A brief introduction sets out the context to which the fragment belongs; the titles and outlines preceding each text are intended to serve as guidance. This anthology does not include texts that have already been quoted and commented on at length in the various sections.

## XENOPHON

### **Texts from *Memoirs of Socrates and Cyropaedia***

See chapter I, 3

*Xenophon was born in Athens around 430 BC and was a disciple of Socrates. In 401, he took part in the expedition of the Ten Thousand against Artaxerxes. He was later exiled from Athens, lived in Sparta, and died after 355 BC.*

1. *Memoirs of Socrates, III, 8, 3-10* [*Spanish translation by Juan Zaragoza in: Xenophon, Memoirs of Socrates. Economic. Banquet. Apology of Socrates, Madrid, Gredos, 1993, pp. 130-132.*]

*The "Memoirs of Socrates" are four books of conversations and episodes involving Socrates. In II, 1, Socrates has convinced Aristippus, a citizen of Cyrene and companion of Socrates somewhat older than Plato, and now Aristippus wants to do the same to Socrates and asks him if he knows anything good. Socrates addresses the question.*

Theme: *beauty and its connection to goodness and usefulness.*

Structure: [1] *The various types of beauty in relation to various purposes.* [2] *The identity of beauty, goodness, and usefulness.* [3] *The variability and relativity of beauty, goodness, and usefulness.* [4] *A house is beautiful if it is useful.*

[1] –So, if you are asking me if I know anything good 3  
that is not good for anything, I neither know it nor need it.

And on another occasion, when Aristippus asked him if he knew of anything 4  
beautiful, he said:

"I know many things."

–And are they all similar to each other?

[2] –On the contrary, some are as different as they can be.

–And how is it possible for something different from beauty to be beautiful?

–By Zeus! Just as there is a man who is beautiful for running and another who is beautiful for fighting, a shield that is beautiful for defence is completely different from a javelin, which is beautiful for throwing with force and speed.

–You have answered me the same way you did when I asked you if you knew anything 5  
good.

- [3] –And do you believe that one thing is good and the other beautiful? Do you not know that all things are beautiful and good for the same purpose? First of all, virtue is not good in one sense and beautiful in another. Secondly, men are considered beautiful and good in the same way and with respect to the same things, and in the same ways that men's bodies appear beautiful and good, in those same ways everything that men use is considered beautiful and good with respect to the purpose for which they are useful.
- 6 –So a basket for carrying manure is also something beautiful?  
 –Yes, by Zeus! And a golden shield is ugly from the moment the basket is well made for its use and the shield is poorly made.
- [4] –Do you mean that the same things are both beautiful and ugly?
- 7 –Yes, by Zeus, good and bad, for often what is good for hunger is bad for fever, and what is good for fever is bad for hunger. Often, too, what is beautiful for running is ugly for fighting, for all things are good and beautiful for the purpose for which they are suited, and bad and ugly for the purpose for which they are not suited.
- 8 Also, when he said that houses themselves were beautiful and useful, I believe he was teaching how they should be built, and he made the following considerations: Shouldn't someone who is going to have a proper house try to make it as pleasant as possible to live in and also as useful as possible? And a
- 9 Once this principle was accepted, he continued: Isn't it nice for it to be cool in summer and warm in winter? And once this point was also agreed upon, he said: If the houses face south, the sun shines through the arcades in winter and provides shade in summer when it passes over our heads and the roofs. So, if it is good for houses to be like this, the parts facing south should be built higher, so that the winter sun is not blocked, and the parts facing north should be built lower, so that cold winds do not enter through them.
- 10 In short, the most pleasant and beautiful house would logically be one in which one could take refuge most comfortably in all seasons of the year and in which one could keep one's possessions most securely. On the other hand, paintings and decorations take away more satisfaction than they produce. As for temples and altars, he said that the most suitable place was the most open and at the same time the furthest from traffic, because it is pleasant to pray with them in view and to approach them with pure intentions.

2. *Memoirs of Socrates, III, 10, 9-15 [pp. 139-140].*

Theme: *proportion and usefulness.*

Structure: [1] *The best proportion corresponds to the greatest utility.* [2] *Criticism of an abstract proportion.* [3] *Colour and beauty, if they serve no purpose, are meaningless.*

[1] Another day, he entered the house of the armourer Pistias, who showed Socrates some well-finished breastplates.

"By Hera!" he exclaimed, "what a fine invention, Pistias, that the armour protects the part of a man that needs protection, and does not hinder the free use of the hands. But tell me one thing, Pistias, why, without making the armour-  
They are neither stronger nor more expensive than the others, yet you sell them at a higher price?"

–Because I make them more proportionate.

[2] –And how do you demonstrate this proportion to justify the higher price, by measurement or by weight? Because I don't believe you make them all the same or similar, if you make them to measure.

–That's how I make them, by Zeus! A breastplate would be useless without that requirement.

–So there are well-proportioned human bodies and others that not?

–Obviously.

–How do you make a proportionate armour fit a disproportionate body?

–By making sure it fits, because if it fits, it is proportionate.

–It seems to me, said Socrates, that following your reasoning, you speak of proportion not in itself but in relation to the user, as if you were talking about a shield, saying that it is proportionate to the person who fits it well, or about a cloak or things in general. But perhaps fitting has another advantage that is not insignificant.

–Teach me, Socrates, if you are able to do so.

[3] –Armour that fits well is less burdensome than armour that does not fit well, even if it weighs the same, because armour that fits poorly, whether it hangs from the shoulders with all its weight or compresses some other part of the body excessively, is uncomfortable and unpleasant to wear. On the other hand, those that fit well distribute the weight evenly between the collarbones and shoulder blades, shoulders, chest, back and stomach, to the point that they are almost an extension of the body rather than a burden.

–You just stated precisely why I believe my works are worth so much. However, some prefer to buy painted and gilded armour.

–Truly, he said, if they buy armour that does not fit for that reason, I think what they are buying is a painted and gilded nuisance. But considering that the body is not still, but that some times it bends and other times it straightens, how could tight armour fit well?

"Not at all," he said.

"You mean, then, that the armour that fits well is not the tight kind, but the kind that does not bother you when you wear it.

"You said it, Socrates, and you understood perfectly.

3. *Memoirs of Socrates, II, 1, 21–34 [pp. 66–70].*

*Socrates wants to convince Aristippus of the need to control one's impulses and quotes from the work "The Hours" by the sophist Prodicus (who was born in Ceos around 470) the story of Heracles at the crossroads.*

*Theme: the difference between sensory beauty (i.e., beauty that only serves the senses) and beauty that is identical to the areté of human beings, to their own abilities.*

*Structure: [1] Sensory beauty, which serves pleasure. [2] Critique of sensory beauty and the purposes it serves. [3] Dignity of human beauty.*

- 21 [1] And the wise Prodicus, in his writing on Hercules, which he read publicly many times, expresses himself in the same way about virtue, saying more or less, as I recall: 'When Heracles was passing from childhood to adolescence, a time when young people, as they become independent, reveal whether they will follow the path of virtue or vice in life, they say that he went out to a quiet place and sat down.
- 22 without knowing which of the two paths to take. And two tall women appeared before him, one of them beautiful in appearance and noble in nature, her body adorned with purity, her gaze modest, her figure sober, dressed in white. The other was well-fed, plump and soft, embellished with colour, so that she appeared whiter and redder than she was, and her figure appeared more slender than it actually was. Her eyes were wide open and she wore a dress that revealed her youthful charms. She gazed at herself incessantly, checking to see if anyone else was watching her, and every few moments she would even turn to look at herself again.
- 23 their own shadow. When they were closer to Heracles, while the first one continued walking at the same pace, the second one eagerly moved forward to approach Heracles and said to him: "I see you are undecided, Heracles, about the path of life you must take. Therefore, if you take me as your friend, I will lead you along the sweetest and easiest path, you will not be left without tasting any of the pleasures, and you will live without knowing any of the difficulties."
- 24 Firstly, you will not have to worry about wars or work, but will spend your life thinking about what pleasant food or drink you could find, what you could see or hear to delight you, what you would like to smell or touch, which young people you would most like to be with, how to sleep...
- 25 you would look softer, and how you would achieve all this with the least amount of work. And if you ever feel apprehensive about the expense of achieving this, do not fear that I will make you exert yourself and torment your body and spirit to obtain it, but rather that you will take advantage of the work of others, without depriving yourself of anything that can be of benefit, because to those who follow me
- 26 follow me, I give the power to take advantage of everything." He said

Heracles, upon hearing these words, said, "Woman, what is your name?" And she replied, "My friends call me Happiness, but those who hate me, to denigrate me, call me Evil." [2] At this, the other woman approached and  
27  
said: "I have also come to you, Heracles, because I know who your parents are and I have observed your character during your upbringing. Therefore, I hope that if you turn your path towards me, you will surely become a good executor of noble and beautiful deeds, and that  
I myself will be much more esteemed and illustrious for the goods I bestow. I'm not going to fool you with pleasurable foreplay, but rather explain how  
That is how things really are, as the gods have established them. For  
28  
all the good and noble things that exist, the gods grant nothing to men without effort or solicitation, but if you want the gods to be favourable to you, you must honour them; if you want your friends to esteem you, you must do them favours; and if you want any city to honour you, you must  
If you wish to serve the city, you must try to do Greece some good; if you want the land to yield abundant fruits, you must take care of it; if you believe you should enrich yourself with livestock, you must care for the livestock; if you aspire to prosper through war and want to be able to help your friends and subdue your enemies, you must learn the martial arts from those who know them and train yourself in how to use them. If you want to acquire physical strength, you will have to accustom your body to submit to intelligence and en-  
train him through hard work and sweat." Evil, according to Pródi-  
29  
interrupted, saying: "Do you realise, Heracles, how long and difficult the path to happiness is that this woman is laying out for you? I will lead you to happiness by an easy and short path." [3] Then Virtue said: "Wretched  
30  
Ble! What good do you possess? Or what do you know of pleasure if you are not willing to do anything to achieve it? You who do not even wait for the desire for pleasure, but before you desire it, you satisfy yourself with everything, eating before you are hungry, drinking before you are thirsty, hiring cooks to eat at your leisure, seeking out expensive wines to drink with pleasure, running everywhere to find snow in summer. To sleep comfortably, you are not content with soft bedding, but you also procure armour for your beds. For you desire sleep not because of your work, but because you have nothing to do. And as for the pleasures of love, you force them before you need them, resorting to all kinds of artifices and using men as women. This is how you educate your own friends, harassing them at night and making them go to bed at the best ho-  
Despite being immortal, you have been rejected by the gods, and 31  
Good men despise you. You never hear the most pleasant of sounds, that of praise for yourself, nor do you ever behold the most beautiful sight, because you have never witnessed a good deed done by you. Who could believe you when you speak? Who would help you in times of need? Who in their right mind would dare to be your friend? This is the case with people who, while they are young, are physically

weak, and in old age they become dull-witted, having been kept bright and effortless in their youth, but going through old age withered and weary, ashamed of their past actions and burdened by their present ones, after rushing through the pleasures of youth and reserving the blemishes for old age. I, on the other hand, am among the gods and

- 32 with men of good will, and there is no beautiful divine or human action that is done without me. I receive more honours than anyone else, both among the gods and among men who are kindred to me. I am a valued collaborator for artisans, a loyal guardian of the house for lords, a benevolent assistant for servants, a good helper for the work of peace, a sure ally in the efforts of war, the best intermediary in friendship. My friends enjoy food and drink without problems, because they abstain from them when they feel no desire. Their sleep is more pleasant...
- 33 They are not as lazy as the idle, and if they feel annoyed when they are left alone, they do not neglect their duties because of it. Young people are happy with the praise of their elders, and older people are pleased with the honours bestowed upon them by young people. They enjoy reminiscing about past deeds and take pleasure in carrying out their present ones. Thanks to me, they are friends of the gods, esteemed by their friends, and honoured by their country. And when their fate-marked end comes, they do not lie ingloriously forgotten, but flourish forever in memory, celebrated with hymns. So it is, Heracles, son of illustrious parents, as you will be able, through continued effort, to con-
- 34 pursue the most perfect happiness." That was more or less how Prodicus described Heracles' education by Virtue, although he embellished his concepts with more magnificent expressions than those I have used here. So it is worthwhile, Aristippus, for you to meditate on this and try to concern yourself with the time you have left to live.

4. *Cyropaedia*, V, 1, 2-18 [Spanish translation by Ana Vegas Sansalvador in: *Xenophon, Cyropaedia*, Madrid, Gredos, 1987, pp. 277-282].

*This work is an idealised biography of Cyrus the Great (559–529 BC) in eight books.*

Theme: *obligation and freedom in the face of beauty: the most beautiful woman in Asia, Pantea, wife of Abradatas of Susa.*

Structure: [1] *The seductive beauty of Pantea.* [2] *The danger of sensory beauty and the defence against it.*

- 2 [1] Cyrus summoned Araspas, a Median who had been his childhood companion and to whom he had also given the Median robe after discarding it himself when he returned from the court of Astyages to Persia, and asked him to guard the woman and the tent. This woman was the wife of Abradatas of Susa. Her husband, coincidentally, was not in the camp.
- 3

Assyrian when he was captured, because he had gone with an embassy to the king of Bactria, where the Assyrian king had sent him to arrange an alliance, since he happened to have ties of hospitality with the king of Bactria. So Cyrus asked Araspas to guard the woman 4 until he could take her. At this request, Araspas asked:

"But Cyrus, have you seen the woman you ask me to guard?"

"No, by Zeus," exclaimed Cyrus, "I have not seen her."

"Well," said Araspas, "I did see her when I set her aside for your lot. Truthfully, when we entered your shop, we didn't recognise her at first, because she was sitting on the floor with all the maids around her, and she was wearing clothes similar to those of her slaves; but when we wanted to know who the mistress was, we looked at them all carefully and she quickly stood out from the rest, even though she was sitting with the head covered and looking at the floor. When we ordered her to stand up, she 5 all her companions rose with her, and then it was clear how she stood out from the others, first in stature, then in nobility and composure

, even though she was in a humble position. And you could see her tears falling, some on her peplos and others even reaching her feet. And when the most senior among us said to her, "Take heart, woman, for we have heard it said that your husband is handsome and noble; however, we now choose you for 6 a man who, know this well, is not inferior to him in appearance, intelligence, or strength; we consider that, if any man is worthy of admiration, it is Cyrus, to whom you will belong from now on." As soon as the woman heard these words, she tore her peplos from top to bottom and began to lament loudly, and her maidservants began to

shout with her. At that moment, most of 7 her face, neck and hands were exposed, and you know well, Cyrus, she said, that in my opinion and in that of all the others who saw her, no woman of mortal parents has ever been born or existed in Asia who is so beautiful; but it is absolutely necessary, she urged him, that you see her for yourself.

Cyrus then exclaimed:

"No, by Zeus, especially if it is as you say."

"And why not?" asked the young man.

"Because," replied Cyrus, "if now, after hearing you say she is beautiful, I allow myself to be persuaded by your words to go and see her, even though I do not have much time, I fear that she will persuade me much sooner to see her again and that, perhaps, from that moment on, I will neglect my duties to sit and contemplate her.

[2] And the young man laughed and said:

–Do you believe, Cyrus, that the beauty of a human being is capable of compelling someone to act contrary to what is good, even if they do not want to? If nature

had that power, it would compel everyone equally. Look how fire burns 10 to all equally, for that is its nature; but when it comes to beautiful creatures, men fall in love with some and not with others, one with one, another with another, for it is a voluntary feeling,

He continued, and each one falls in love with whomever they want: for example, the brother does not fall in love with the sister, it is someone else who falls in love with her, nor does the father fall in love with the daughter, but rather it is someone else who falls in love with her, for the

11 Fear and the law have the power to prevent these loves. And, he continued, if there were a law prohibiting those who do not eat from being hungry, those who do not drink from being thirsty, those who are cold in winter and hot in summer from feeling cold or hot, no law would be able to make men obey these precepts, for nature subjects them to them. Love, on the other hand, is a voluntary feeling, so each person falls in love with the creatures that suit them, such as clothes or shoes.

12 "So," asked Cyrus, "if love is voluntary, why isn't it also voluntary to stop loving someone when you want to?" I have seen people weep for lovesickness and be slaves to their beloved, even though before falling in love they considered slavery a great evil, give away a large part of their possessions that it would have been preferable not to part with, and beg the gods for liberation from love, as if it were just another illness; yet they are unable to free themselves, but are bound by a necessity stronger than if they were chained with iron. For example, they devote themselves to their beloved, often providing them with superfluous services, and yet, despite such evils, they do not try to flee, but even take care that their beloved does not flee.

13 And the young man replied to Cyrus' arguments:

—Indeed, that is how they behave; however, individuals who engage in such conduct are miserable: that is why, I believe, they continually boast of wishing for death because they feel unfortunate; but, since there are many ways to free themselves from life, they do not do so. These are the same individuals who try to steal and do not refrain from taking what belongs to others. However, when they have stolen or robbed someone, do you realise that you, first of all, since you do not consider theft a natural necessity, blame the thief and the robber, and do not

14 do you forgive him, but rather punish him? Likewise, he continued, individuals Noble men do not force others to love them or aspire to what they should not, but miserable beings, I believe, are incapable of controlling all their desires and then blame love. On the contrary, noble and honourable men, even if they desire gold, good horses or beautiful women, can nevertheless easily do without all these goods, so that they do not take possession of them outside the bounds of justice. So, I concluded, even though I had...

15 Having seen that woman and finding her very beautiful, I am nevertheless by your side on my horse and carrying out the other duties that concern me.

16 "Yes, by Zeus," exclaimed Cyrus, "but perhaps you turned away from her before allowing the time that nature requires for love to take hold of a man, for one can touch fire without being burned immediately, and wood does not catch fire immediately either. however, I deliberately do not touch fire, nor do I direct my gaze towards beautiful beings; nor do I advise you, Araspas, to

Allow your gaze to linger on beautiful beings; just as fire burns those who touch it, so too do beautiful beings inflame those who gaze upon them from afar, causing them to burn with love.

"Have confidence, Cyrus," said Araspas, "for even if I did not cease to contemplate her, there is no risk that her power over me would lead me to commit an act that I should not commit."

contemplate her, there is no risk that her power over me will lead me to commit an act that I should not commit.

"Well said. Very well, said Cyrus, guard her as I ask, and take care of her, for perhaps this woman has come to us at the right moment.

Then, having said this, they parted ways.

18

The young man, while admiring the woman's beauty, also noticed her honesty, and as he served her with the intention of pleasing her, he observed that she was not ungrateful, but rather, in fair return, she made sure through her servants that when he returned home, he had everything he needed, and that if he ever fell ill, he would lack nothing. Because of all these attentions, the young man fell in love with her, and perhaps it is not surprising that this happened. Indeed, that was how things were.

#### 5. Memories of Socrates, III, 10, 1–8 [pp. 136–139].

Theme: *the theory of imitation: the essence of painting.*

Structure: [1] *Painting as imitation of visible objects.* [2] *Painting as imitation of an ideal object.* [3] *Painting as imitation of the invisible.* [4] *Sculpture as imitation of the figure of the perfect soul.*

[1] Furthermore, if I ever conversed with someone who had a trade and practised it professionally, it was also useful to them. One day, the painter visited Parrasio's house, and while chatting with him, he said:

"Tell me, Parrasio, isn't painting a representation of the objects we see? For example, you imitate, representing it through colours, depth and relief, darkness and shadows, hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, youth and decrepitude.

"You are right," he said.

[2] –And undoubtedly, if you wish to represent perfectly beautiful forms, given that it is not easy to find a single man whose limbs are all flawless, you gather from various models what each one has that is most beautiful, and thus you achieve a whole that appears completely beautiful.

–That is what we do, he said.

[3] –And what about the most seductive, the most pleasant, the most lovable?

ble, what is most longed for and desired: the character of the soul? Do you also imitate it? Or is it not representable?

"How could it be representable," he said, "when it has no definite proportion, no colour, none of the properties you have just mentioned, in a word, when it is not visible?"

- 4 "And is it not common for men to show expressions of love and hatred?  
 "I think so," he said.  
 "And can't that be imitated in the gaze?"  
 "Of course."  
 –And do you think that those who care about their friends' joys and  
 misfortunes make the same faces as those who do not care?  
 –Of course not, by Zeus! In times of joy, they have radiant faces, and in  
 times of misfortune, sad faces.  
 –And can that also be represented?  
 –Certainly, he said.
- 5 –But arrogance and independence, humility and servility, temperance and  
 intelligence, insolence and rudeness are also evident in men's countenances  
 and attitudes, whether they are standing still or moving.  
 –What you say is true.  
 –And isn't all of that imitable?  
 –I certainly think so, he said.  
 –And what do you think is more pleasant to see, men who display beautiful,  
 kind and amiable characters, or those who allow themselves to be seen as ugly,  
 evil and hateful?  
 "By Zeus, there is a great difference, Socrates.
- 6 [4] On another occasion, he visited the workshop of the sculptor Cliton  
 and, talking to him, said:  
 "The runners, athletes, boxers and wrestlers you make are beautiful,  
 Cliton, I see that and I know it, but what captivates the spirit of the spectators  
 most is that they seem alive. How do you manage to infuse your statues with  
 that quality?"
- 7 And as Cliton, perplexed, was unable to answer immediately, he  
 continued:  
 "Is it by taking living figures as models that you manage to make your  
 sculptures seem more alive?  
 "Yes, that's right."  
 –Isn't it by imitating the parts of the body that are relaxed and tense,  
 compressed or separated, taut or loose, that you manage to make your works  
 more realistic and convincing?
- 8 –Absolutely.  
 –And doesn't representing the feelings of bodies that are engaged in some activity  
 also produce a certain delight in viewers?  
 –That's logical.  
 –In that case, shouldn't the eyes of the combatants be depicted as  
 threatening and the gaze of the victors as joyful?  
 –Necessarily.  
 –Then the sculptor must represent the activities of the soul with the  
 figure.

## PLATO

### **Texts from *Phaedrus* and *The Symposium***

See chapter II, 1

*Plato was born in Athens in 429 BC. He was a disciple of Socrates, and after Socrates' death in 399, he travelled extensively and returned to Athens around 345 BC.*

*385. He then founded the Academy and taught philosophy. All his works, except for the 'Apology of Socrates', are written in the form of dialogue. He died in 347 BC.*

1. *Phaedrus, 249 d - 251 b and 253 c - 255 a [translation by Emilio Lledó Íñigo in: Plato, Dialogues, vol. III, Madrid, Gredos, 1997, pp. 352-356, 360-362].*

*After a discussion on the advantage of not being in love (since those who are have lost their minds), Socrates defends love as a healthy and divine madness. In 244 a and following, he mentions three types of beneficial and divine madness: prophetic, religious, and that of those who are enthusiastic about the muses. The fourth type of divine madness is that of the lover.*

*Theme: eroticism as an effect of true beauty in this world.*

*Structure: A. The supreme form of madness: the memory of having contemplated true beauty. [1] The fourth type of madness: contempt for the earthly in the search for true beauty. [2] All souls have seen the true entity, but only a few remember it. [3] The memory of seeing an image of the original causes enthusiasm and ecstasy.*

*[4] The memory is inflamed above all by the radiance of beauty. [5] It is the memory of happy times spent among the gods.*

*B. The radiance of beauty provokes love and transforms us. [1] Radiance belongs to the essence of beauty. [2] We perceive beauty with our most acute sense. [3] That is why beauty is the most dazzling and lovable thing. [4] Those who remember too faintly seek animal pleasure. [5] Those who are still close to the original tremble when contemplating perfect earthly beauty. [6] They worship the beloved beauty as a god. [7] Their soul is transformed and takes flight.*

*C. The suffering of the soul when contemplating beauty. [1] The division of the soul into the charioteer, the good and obedient horse, and the bad and disobedient horse. [2] When contemplating beauty, the bad horse rushes towards pleasure and the beloved. [3] The presence of beauty causes reverence, so that the*

*charioteer attempts to stop the horses. [4] New struggle between the charioteer and the bad horse. [5] Finally, modest pursuit of beauty.*

A [1] And this is precisely where all that talk about the fourth form of madness comes in, the one that occurs when someone contemplates the beauty of this world and, remembering the true beauty, sprouts wings and, thus winged, feels the desire to take flight. Unable to do so, looks up as if they were a bird, forgetting those below, and giving rise to the belief that they are mad. So, of all the forms of 'enthusiasm', this is the best of the best, both for those who have it and for those with whom they communicate it; and those who share this passion, those who love beauty, are called lovers.

249e

[2] So, as has been said, every human soul, by its very nature, has seen true beings, or it would not have become the

250a

living being that it is. But remembering them, for those here, is not an easy matter for everyone, neither for those who fleetingly saw the things there at that time, nor for those who had the misfortune, when they fell, to stray into certain company, towards injustice, forgetting the sacred spectacle they had once seen. Few, then, have sufficient memory. [3] But when they see something similar to what they saw there, they are transfixed, unable to control themselves, and without knowing what is happening to them, as they cannot perceive it properly.

b

[4] Thus, there remains no trace of justice, wisdom, or anything else of value to the soul in the imitations found here below, and only with effort and through obscure means are a few able to intuit the nature of what is represented, relying on images.

[5] But seeing the radiance of beauty was possible then, when with the choir of the blessed we had the divine and joyful vision in sight, as we followed the procession of Zeus, and others that of other gods, as initiates.

c

that we were in those mysteries, which it is fair to call the most joyful, and which we celebrated in all our fullness and without suffering any of the evils that awaited us in the time to come. Full and pure and serene and happy were the visions into which we were initiated, and from which, at their supreme moment, we attained the clearest brightness, clear ourselves too, without the stigma that is this tomb that surrounds us and which we call the body, prisoners in it like an oyster.

B [1] All this is thanks to the memory that, in longing for what was then, has led to much talk here now. As we were saying, and as far as beauty is concerned, she shone among all the others.

d

those visions; [2] but, upon arriving here, we perceive it through our clearest sense, because it is also the one that shines most clearly. Sight is, in fact, for us the finest of the sensations that reach us through the body; [3] but with it we cannot see the mind – because it would cause us terrible loves, if its image had the same clarity that it has, and thus reached our sight – and

the same would happen with everything else that is worthy of love. But only beauty has been given the most dazzling and lovable nature.

[4] However, those who are no longer novices or who have become corrupted do not allow themselves to be <sup>b</sup> and

led swiftly from here to there, to where beauty itself is, by looking at what bears that name here, so that when he contemplates it he feels no thrill, but, given over to pleasure, he seeks like a quadruped to cover and make children, and already well versed in his excesses, he neither fears nor is ashamed to pursue a pleasure contrary to nature

[5] However, he whose initiation is still recent, he who <sup>251a</sup>

He contemplated much of those times, when he sees a divine face, or glimpses, in the body, an idea that closely imitates beauty, he first trembles, and some of the fears of yesteryear come over him [6] and then, looking at it, he venerates it as if it were a god, and if he were not afraid of appearing very mad, he would offer sacrifices to his beloved as if he were the image of a god. [7] For, having seen him, he is seized, after the shudder, with a disturbance that causes him to sweat and an unusual

ardour. Receiving this stream of beauty through the eyes, it warms <sup>b</sup> with a warmth that soaks, so to speak, the nature of the wing, and, as it warms up, the seeds of germination soften, which, closed by dryness, prevented them from flowering; and, moreover, if food flows in, the stem of the wing and begins to sprout from the root, from within the very substance of the soul, which before, indeed, was entirely winged. [...]

C [1] Just as we did at the beginning of this myth, in which we divided each soul into three parts, two of which were in the form of a horse and a third in the form of a charioteer, let us continue to use this division now as well. <sup>253d</sup>

simile. We were saying, then, that one of the horses is good and the other is not. But we did not say then what constituted the excellence of the good one and the rebelliousness of the bad one, but we must say it now. Well, of the two, the one that occupies the preferred position is upright and has fine legs, a haughty neck, an aquiline muzzle, white in colour, with black eyes, a lover of glory with moderation and honour, a follower of sound opinion...

dadera and, without a whip, docile to the voice and the word. In contrast, the other is <sup>e</sup>

Stunted, large, with coarse joints, a thick, short neck, a flattened forehead, black in colour, grey eyes, fiery blood, a companion of excess and arrogance, with hairy ears, deaf, barely obedient to the whip and spurs. [2] So when the charioteer, seeing his beloved's face, feels a warmth running through his soul, filling him with the tingling and stinging of desire, the one of the horses that is docile to him,

Dominated then, as always, by honour, he restrains himself so as not to pounce on his beloved. The other, however, no longer paying attention to the goads or the charioteer's whip, throws himself forward in an impetuous leap, putting the one yoked with him and the charioteer in all sorts of trouble, and forcing them to go to the beloved and bring him the pleasures of Aphrodite.

the pleasures of Aphrodite. At first, they resist irritably, as

if they had to do something unworthy and outrageous. But in the end, when <sup>b</sup>

Evil cannot be stopped; they allow themselves to be led wherever they are taken, yielding and agreeing to do whatever they are pushed to do. And so they arrive with him, and contemplate the resplendent face of the beloved.

[3] When the charioteer witnesses this, his memory is transported to the nature of beauty, and he sees it once again raised on its sacred throne and accompanied by wisdom. Seeing it, he falls face up in fear and veneration. At

- c At the same time, he cannot help but pull back on the reins so violently that he makes both horses sit on their haunches, one willingly, offering no resistance, the other reluctantly, much to its chagrin. [4] A little way off, one of them, ashamed and stunned, breaks out in a sweat that soaks his whole soul; but the other, as the pain of the bridle and the fall subsides, still breathless, begins to rage furiously, hurling all kinds of insults at the charioteer and his team, as if through cowardice and weakness he had failed in his duty and broken his promise.
- d And, once again, forcing those who do not want to come closer, he reluctantly agrees, when asked, to leave it for another time.

But when the appointed time comes, he refreshes the memory of those who pretend not to remember, coercing them with neighs and jerks until he forces them once again to approach their beloved and say the same words. When they are close, with his head lowered and his tail extended, biting the bridle, he drags them along insolently. However, the charioteer, who experiences the same feeling even more intensely, tenses up,

- e as if he were at the starting line, pulling the brake from the teeth of the overwhelming steed with the force with which he now holds him back. His foul-mouthed tongue and jaws fill with blood, and he "surrenders to suffering" his legs and hindquarters, digging them into the ground. [5] But when the bad horse has had to endure the same thing many times, and its indocility runs out, humiliated, it finally submits to the prudence of the charioteer, and at the sight of the beautiful beloved, it feels itself dying of fear. And so it happens that the lover's soul, reverent and fearful, follows the beloved.

2. The Symposium, 199 c - 212 c [*Spanish translation by M. Martínez Hernández in: Plato, Dialogues, vol. III, Madrid, Gredos, 1997, pp. 240-265*].

*Agathon, author of tragedies, achieved his first tragic success in 416 at the Lenaia and organised a banquet to celebrate this victory. The participants decided that each of them would give a speech on Eros. After the host spoke, Socrates spoke last.*

Topic: *Socrates' speech on Eros. The goal of Eros: the procreation of beauty in beauty.*

Structure: *A. Eros, the love of the good and the beautiful, needs them. [1] Eros is Eros of something. [2] Eros is Eros of what one does not have. [3] Eros is Eros of what one does not have now or wants to have in the future. [4] The goal of Eros*

is beauty, not ugliness. [5] Thus, Eros needs beauty, which is why it is not beautiful. [6] Since beauty is good, Eros also needs goodness.

B. Eros is not a god, as he is between good and evil, ugly and beautiful. [1] Socrates is going to recount what Diotima told him. [2] Starting point: Eros is neither good nor beautiful. [3] Nor is Eros ugly or evil, but something in between. [4] He is not a god, for gods are good and beautiful.

C. Eros is a demon, son of Poros and Penia. [1] He is between god and man, he is a demon. [2] The demon establishes the connection between gods and men. [3] Eros is the son of Penia (poverty) and Poros (abundance), conceived during the festival celebrating the birth of Aphrodite, whom he therefore accompanies. [4] Because of his mother, he is poor, dirty and needy. [5] Thanks to his father, he aspires to beauty and knowledge.

[6] Therefore, Eros is between life and death, poverty and wealth, wisdom and ignorance.

D. Philosophy is essentially a field of Eros. [1] A god or a sage does not philosophise, for he has wisdom. [2] An ignorant person does not philosophise, for he does not realise that he lacks wisdom. [3] The philosopher is between the two, just like Eros. [4] Since wisdom is something beautiful, philosophy is necessarily a field of Eros. [5] Reason for the erroneous opinion about Eros: Eros is not the beloved and beautiful, but the one who loves.

E. Eros is, in the broadest sense, the aspiration to possess what is good. [1] What is the purpose of Eros? [2] Eros is, in general, the aspiration to what is good, that is, to happiness, which is an end in itself. [3] Strictly speaking, only a very specific aspiration to happiness is called 'love'. [4] In a broad sense, Eros aspires to always have what is good.

F. The work of Eros: procreation in beauty for the sake of immortality. [1] What is the work of love in the strict sense? [2] Eros is the aspiration to procreation and birth in beauty. [3] Procreation in beauty is the possibility for human beings to participate in immortality, in eternal goodness, and is therefore the goal of Eros. [4] Eros also exercises his power over animals. [5] Here too, Eros is the aspiration to immortality. [6] Immortality in mortality (both in body and soul) consists in generating something equal.

G. Above physical procreation is spiritual procreation.

[1] The aspiration to immortality is also evident in the aspiration to immortal fame. [2] Alongside the impulse towards physical procreation is the impulse of the soul towards procreation, which is possessed by lovers of wisdom, poets and artists. [3] This impulse also generates only beauty and is strongest in the sphere of community life.

H. The stages in the knowledge of beauty. [1] Love of beauty in a particular beautiful body. [2] Love of bodily beauty in general. [3] Love of the beauty of a soul and its beautiful endeavours. [4] Love of the beauty of knowledge.

I. The supreme level of beauty as the consummation of life. [1] The fifth stage: the contemplation of absolute beauty. [2] This beauty is not

*has form, it is the sum of all the particular beauties of forms.*

[3] *The path to this beauty passes through the stages indicated.* [4] *And it makes life worthwhile.* [5] *We would like to be united with it forever.* [6] *Only with this beauty can true virtue be generated.* [7] *The procreation of true virtue deserves immortality.* [8] *Eros must be venerated as a guide to this supreme level, and we must follow him.*

A [1] –Truly, dear Agathon, I thought you introduced your speech well when you said that we must first explain the nature of Eros himself and then his works. I like this principle very much. Come now, since you have explained to me, splendidly and formidably, what Eros is like, tell me also what follows...

199d te: Is Eros such that it must be love of something or love of nothing? And I am not asking whether it is love for a mother or a father – for it would be ridiculous to ask whether Eros is love for a mother or a father – but rather, as if I were asking about the word 'father' itself: is a father the father of someone or not? You would undoubtedly tell me, if you wanted to answer me correctly, that a father is the father of a son or a daughter. Wouldn't you?

"Of course," said Agathon.

"And isn't it the same with the word 'mother'? He agreed with this too.

e you may understand better what I mean. If I asked you: what about a brother, as a brother, is he someone's brother or not?

Agathon replied that he was.

"And is he not a brother to a brother or sister?"

Agathon nodded.

"Try, then," Socrates continued, "to say the same thing about love. Is Eros the love of something or of nothing?"

"Of course he is of something.

200a [2] "Well then," said Socrates, "keep this in mind and remember what love is. But now answer me this: does Eros desire that which he loves, or not?"

"Naturally," he said.

"And does he desire and love what he desires and loves when he possesses it, or when he does not possess it?"

"Probably," said Agathon, "when he does not possess it."

"Consider, then," Socrates continued, "whether it is not rather necessary that it should be so, that is, that one desires what one lacks and does not desire what one does not lack. To me, Agathon, it seems extraordinary that it should necessarily be so. What do you think?"

"It seems so to me too," said Agathon.

b "You are right. Would anyone wish to be tall if they were tall, or strong if they were strong?"

–Impossible, according to what we have agreed.

–Because, naturally, someone who already is one could not lack those qualities.

–You're right.

"Well, yes," Socrates continued, "the strong man wants to be strong, the swift man wants to be swift, the healthy man wants to be healthy... Perhaps, indeed, some might think, with regard to these qualities and all those similar to them, that those who are thus and possess them also desire what they possess; and I say this precisely so that we may not deceive ourselves." [3] These people, Agathon, if you look closely, necessarily possess each of the qualities they possess at the present moment, whether they want to or not. And who would want to have precisely what they already have? But when someone says to us, 'I, who am healthy, would also like to be healthy, and being rich, I also want to be rich, and I desire what I possess,' we would say to them, 'You, man, who already have wealth, health and strength, what you really want is to have this in the future as well, for at the present moment, at least, whether you want it or not, you already possess it. Consider, then, whether when you say, 'I desire what I have,' you do not really mean something else, namely, 'I want to have in the future what I have now.'" Would you not agree?

Agathon – according to what Aristodemus told me – said he would. Then Socrates said:

'And to love that which is not yet available to one and which one does not yet possess is not precisely this, that is, that one will also have the preservation and maintenance of these qualities in the future?

"Certainly," said Agathon.

–Therefore, this person and anyone else who feels desire also desires what is not available to them and is not present, what they do not possess, what they are not and what they lack. Are these not, more or less, the things that are desired and loved?

[4] –Of course, said Agathon.

"Well then," Socrates continued, "let us recapitulate the points on which we have agreed. Is it not true that Eros is, first of all, love of something, and then love of what one really needs?

"Yes," he said.

–That being the case, remember now what you said in your speech that was the subject of Eros. Or, if you like, I will remind you myself. I believe, in fact, that you said something like this: that among the gods, activities were organised for the sake of beauty, since there was no love for ugliness. Did you not say something like that?

"I did say that, indeed," said Agathon.

"And you are quite right, my friend," said Socrates. "And if this is so, is it not true that Eros would be love of beauty and not of ugliness?

Agathon agreed with this.

b "But haven't you agreed that you love what you lack and do not possess?"  
"Yes," he said.  
[5] –Then Eros does not possess beauty and is lacking it.  
"Necessarily," he affirmed.  
–And what? What is lacking in beauty and does not possess it at all,  
do you say is beautiful?  
"No, of course not."  
–Do you still recognise that Eros is beautiful, if this is so?  
"It seems to me, Socrates," said Agathon, "that you knew nothing of  
what I said before.

"And yet," Socrates continued, "you spoke well, Agathon. [6] But answer me  
a little more. Don't you think that good things are also beautiful?"  
c "At least, I think so."  
"Then, if Eros lacks beautiful things, and if good things are beautiful, he  
also lacks good things.

"I, Socrates," said Agathon, "could not contradict you. Therefore, let it be as  
you say.

"Not at all," replied Socrates; "it is the truth, dear Agathon, which you  
cannot contradict, since it is not at all difficult for Socrates.

B [1] But I will leave you for now and tell you about the discourse on  
Eros that I heard one day from the lips of a woman from Mantinea, Diotima,  
who was wise in these and many other things. Thus, for example, on one  
occasion she obtained for the Athenians, having made a sacrifice for the  
d plague, a ten-year postponement of the epidemic. She was, precisely, the one  
who also taught me the things of love. I will therefore try to explain to you,  
on my own, as far as I can and based on what Agathon and I agreed, the  
speech that woman gave. [2] Consequently, Agathon, as you explained, it is  
necessary to first describe Eros himself, who he is and what his nature is, and  
then explain his works. It seems to me, therefore, that the easiest way is to  
proceed as the stranger did on that occasion when she was questioning me. For  
I said more or less the same thing to her as Agathon is now saying to me: that  
Eros was a great god and that he was the god of beautiful things. But she  
refuted me with the same arguments that I used against him: that, according  
to my own words, he was neither beautiful nor good.

e [3] "What do you mean, Diotima?" I said. "So Eros is ugly and evil?"  
"Speak better," she said. "Do you think that anything that is not beautiful must  
necessarily be ugly?"

"Exactly."  
"And what is not wise is ignorant? Have you not realised that there is  
something between wisdom and ignorance?"  
"What is that?"

"Do you not know," he said, "that to hold a right opinion, even without being able to give a reason for it, is neither knowledge, since something for which no reason can be given cannot be knowledge, nor ignorance, since what possesses reality cannot be ignorance? Right opinion is, therefore, something like a middle ground between knowledge and ignorance.

"You are right," I said.

"Do not, therefore, claim that what is not beautiful is necessarily ugly, nor what is not good, bad. And so too with Eros, since you yourself agree that he is neither good nor beautiful, do not think that he must be ugly and bad, but something in between, he said, between these two.

[4] "However," I said, "everyone recognises that he is a great god."

'Do you mean,' she said, 'all those who do not know, or also those who do?'

"Absolutely everyone, of course." Then she smiled and said to me:

—And how could they agree, Socrates, that it is a great

d

god those who claim that he is not even a god?

"Who are they?" I said.

"One is you," he said, "and another is me."

"How do you explain that?" I replied.

"Easily," she said. "Tell me, do you not claim that all gods are happy and beautiful? Or would you dare to claim that any of the gods are not beautiful and happy?"

"By Zeus, I would not," I said.

—And don't you call those who possess good and beautiful things happy?

—Indeed.

—But in relation to Eros, at least you have acknowledged that, by lacking

of good and beautiful things, he desires precisely that which he lacks.

—I have acknowledged that, indeed.

—Then how could he be a god who does not share in beauty and goodness?

—In no way, it seems.

"You see, then," she said, "that you do not consider Eros a god either?"

C [1] "What, then, can Eros be?" I said. "A mortal?"

—Not at all.

"Then what is he?"

"As in the previous examples," she said, "something between mortal and immortal.

"And what is that, Diotima?"

"A great daemon, Socrates. For the daemonic is also between

ine

divinity and the mortal.

[2] "And what power does it have?" I said.

go

div

—He interprets and communicates to the gods the affairs of men and to men those of the gods, the supplications and sacrifices of both orders and the rewards for the sacrifices. Being in the midst of both, he fills the space between them, so that the whole remains united with itself as a continuum. Through him, all divination and the art of priests relating to sacrifices, rites, incantations, all kinds of mantics and magic function. The divinity-

203a has no contact with man, but it is through this demon that all contact and dialogue between gods and men takes place, whether they are awake or asleep. And so, he who is wise in such matters is a demonic man, while he who is wise in anything else, whether in the arts or in manual labour, is a mere craftsman. These demons, in fact, are numerous and of all kinds, and one of them is also Eros.

b [3] "And who are his father and mother?" I said.

"It's a long story," he said, "but I'll tell you anyway. When Aphrodite was born, the gods held a banquet, and among them was Poros, the son of Metis. After they had finished eating, Penia came begging, as was to be expected on such a festive occasion, and stood near the door. Meanwhile, Poros, drunk on nectar – for there was no wine yet – entered Zeus' garden and, overcome by drunkenness, fell asleep. Then Penia, scheming, driven by her lack of resources, lay down beside him to bear Poros a son.

c and conceived Eros. For this very reason, Eros is also Aphrodite's companion and squire, having been conceived at the feast celebrating the goddess's birth and being, at the same time, by nature a lover of beauty, given that Aphrodite is also beautiful. Being the son of Poros and Penia, Eros has retained the following characteristics. [4] First, he is always poor, and far from being delicate and beautiful, as

d Most believe that he is rather harsh and dry, barefoot and homeless, always sleeping on the ground and uncovered, lying out in the open at doorways and on the side of the road, always inseparable from poverty because he has his mother's nature. [5] But, on the other hand, in accordance with his father's nature, he is on the lookout for beauty and goodness; he is brave, bold and active, a skilled hunter, always plotting something, eager for wisdom and rich in resources, a lover of knowledge throughout his life, a formidable magician, sorcerer and sophist. [6] He is by nature neither immortal nor mortal, but on the same day he sometimes flourishes and lives, when he is in abundance—

e dance, and others die, but come back to life again thanks to their father's nature. But what he achieves always escapes him, so that Eros is never lacking in resources nor rich, and is, moreover, in the middle of wisdom and ignorance. D [1] For the matter is as follows:

204a None of the gods loves wisdom or desires to be wise, because they already are, nor does anyone else who is wise love wisdom. [2] On the

the other hand, the ignorant neither love wisdom nor desire to become wise, for this is precisely what makes ignorance so troublesome: that those who are neither beautiful, nor good, nor intelligent believe themselves to be sufficiently so. Thus, those who do not believe they are in need do not desire what they do not believe they need.

[3] "Who, then, Diotima," I said, "are those who love wisdom, if they are neither the wise nor the ignorant?"

"Even a child can see," she said, "that they are those who are in between these two, among whom Eros will also be. [4] Wisdom, in fact, is one of the most beautiful things, and Eros is the love of beauty, so Eros is necessarily a lover of wisdom, and because he is a lover of wisdom, he is therefore between the wise and the ignorant. And the cause of this is also his birth, since he is the son of a wise and resourceful father and an unwise and destitute mother.

[5] This, then, dear Socrates, is the nature of this daemon. But as for what you thought Eros was, there is nothing surprising about it. You believed, as I gather from what you say, that Eros was the beloved and not the lover. For this reason, I imagine, it seemed to you

Eros is utterly beautiful, for that which is capable of being loved is also truly beautiful, delicate, perfect, and worthy of being considered blissful, while that which loves has a different character, as I have described.

E [1] –So be it, stranger, I said then, for you speak well. But Eros being of such a nature, what function does he have for men?

"This, Socrates," she said, "is precisely what I am going to try to teach you. I will explain below. Eros is indeed as I have said and was born that way, but at the same time it is love of beautiful things, as you say. But if someone were to ask us, 'In what sense, Socrates and Diotima, is Eros love of beautiful things?'. Or, more clearly, 'He who loves beautiful things desires, what does he desire?

"That they become his," I said.

"But this answer," he said, "still requires the following question: what will become of the one who makes beautiful things his own?

So I told her that I couldn't answer that question right away.

[2] "All right," she said. "Imagine that someone, making a change and using the word 'good' instead of 'beautiful', asked you: 'Let's see, Socrates, the one who loves good things desires, what does he desire?'

"That they become his," I said.

"And what will become of the one who makes good things his own?"

"That," I said, "I can answer more easily: he will be happy." 205a

"Through the possession," he said, "of good things, indeed, the happy are happy, and there is no longer any need to add the question of why he who wants to be happy wants to be happy, but rather the answer seems to have its end.

"You are right," I said.

"Now, do you think that this will and desire is common to all men, and that everyone always wants to possess what is good? Or what do you think?"

"Yes," I said, "it is common to all."

[3] "Why then," he said, "do we not say that everyone loves,  
b if indeed all men love the same thing and always, but we say that some love and others do not?"

"That amazes me too," I said.

"Well, don't be surprised," he said, "because, in fact, we have separated a particular kind of love and, giving it the name of the whole, we call it love, while for the other kinds we use other names."

"Such as?" I said.

"The following. You know that the idea of 'creation' (*poiesis*) is something multiple, for in reality every cause that brings anything from non-being into being is creation, so that also the works accomplished

All arts are creations, and their creators are all creators.

—You're right.

"But you also know," she continued, "that they are not called creators, but have other names, and that a part of the whole of creation has been separated, the part concerning music and verse, and is called by the name of the whole. Only this is called, in effect, 'poetry', and those who possess this portion of creation are called 'poets'."

"You are right," I said.

d —Well, the same is true of love. In general, every desire for what is good and for happiness is, for everyone, 'the greatest and most deceptive love'. But some devote themselves to it in many different ways, whether in business, in a love of gymnastics, or in a love of wisdom, and they are not said to be in love, nor are they called lovers, while those who pursue it and strive for it in a single way are given the name of the whole, love, and they are said to be in love and are called lovers.

"It seems you are telling the truth," I said.

[4] "And there is indeed a legend," she continued, "according to which those who seek their other half are those who are in love."

e Two, but according to my own theory, love is neither half nor whole, unless it is, my friend, truly good, since men are willing to amputate their own feet and hands if they think those parts of themselves are bad. For it is not, I believe, to what is their own that each person clings, unless one identifies what is good with what is particular and proper to oneself and what is bad, on the other hand,

206a with what belongs to others. So, in truth, what men love is nothing other than the good. Or do you think they love something else?

"Not to me, by Zeus!" I said.

"Then," she said, "can we simply say that men love the good?"

"Yes," I said.

"And what? Shouldn't we add," she said, "that they also love to possess the good?"

"We must add that."

"And not only," she continued, "to possess it, but also to possess it always?"

"That must be added too."

"Then," she said, "love is, in short, the desire to always possess what is good."

"That's exactly right," I said.

F [1] "Well then," she said, "since love is always this, what about what manner and in what activity could the ardour and effort of those who pursue it be called love? What exactly is this special action? Can you tell me?"

"If I could," I said, "I would not be admiring you, Diotima, for your wisdom, nor would I have come to you again and again to learn precisely these things."

[2] "Well, I'll tell you," she said. "This special action is, in effect, procreation in beauty, both according to the body and according to the soul."

"What you really mean," I said, "needs divination, for I do not understand it."

"Well, I will explain it more clearly," she said. "The creative impulse, Socrates, is in fact present in all men, not only in their bodies but also in their souls, and when they reach a certain age, our nature desires to procreate. But it cannot procreate in ugliness, for all men, not only in their bodies but also in their souls, have beauty as their ideal."

crates, is possessed by all men, not only in body but also in soul, and when they reach a certain age, our nature desires to procreate. But it cannot procreate in ugliness, only in beauty. The union of man and woman is, in effect, procreation, and it is a divine work, for fertility and reproduction is what is immortal in the living being, which is mortal. But it is impossible for this process to take place in what is incompatible

and the ugly is incompatible with all that is divine, while the beautiful is, on the other hand, compatible. Thus, Beauty is the Moira and Ilithyia of birth. For this reason, when that which has creative impulse approaches beauty, it becomes propitious and spills forth contentedly, procreating and engendering; but when it approaches ugliness, frowning and afflicted, it contracts within itself, withdraws, shrinks and does not engender, but rather retains the fruit of its fertility and bears it painfully. Hence, precisely , the one who is fertilised and already swollen is overcome by the strong raving for beauty, because it frees those who possess it from the great pains of childbirth. [3] For love, Socrates, he said, is not love of beauty, as you believe.

"What is it then?"

"Love of generation and procreation in beauty."

"So be it," I said.

"Of course it is," he said. "Now, why precisely from generation? Because generation is something eternal and immortal insofar as it can exist in something mortal. And it is necessary, as agreed, to desire immortality along with goodness, if truly love

207a aims at the perpetual possession of the good. Thus, according to this reasoning, love is necessarily also love of immortality.

[4] All this, in fact, he taught me whenever he spoke to me about matters of love. But once he asked me:

"What do you think, Socrates, is the cause of that love and desire? Or do you not realise what a terrible state all animals, both terrestrial and winged, are in when they desire to mate, how they are all sick and amorously disposed, in

b Firstly, in relation to their mutual union and then in relation to the care of their offspring, how are they ready not only to fight, even the weakest against the strongest, but also to die, how are they themselves consumed by hunger in order to feed them and thus do everything else? Although, he said, one might think that men do this through reflection, with regard to animals, however, what could be the cause of such loving dispositions?

c Can you tell me?

And once again I told him that I did not know.

"And do you think," she said, "that you will ever become an expert in matters of love if you do not understand this?"

"It is precisely for this reason, Diotima, as I told you before, that I have come to you, aware that I need teachers. Tell me, therefore, the cause of this and everything else related to matters of love."

[5] "Well then," he said, "if you believe that love is by nature love<sup>d</sup> as we have repeatedly agreed, do not be surprised, since in this case, and for the same reason as in the previous one, mortal nature seeks, as far as possible, to exist forever and be immortal. But it can only be so in this way: through procreation, because it always leaves another new being in place of the old one. [6] For even in the time that each living creature is said to live and be the same, as it is said, for example, that a man is the same from childhood until he grows old, nevertheless, although it is said to be the same, that individual never has the same things in himself, but is continually renewing and losing other elements, in his hair, in his flesh, in his bones, in his blood, and in his whole body. And not only in the body, but also in the soul: habits, characters, opinions, desires, pleasures, sorrows, fears, none of these things ever remain the same in each individual, but some are born and others die. But even stranger than this is that also the co-

208a Knowledge does not simply arise and die within us, so that

We are never the same, not even in relation to knowledge, but the same thing happens to each of them individually. For what is called practising exists because knowledge leaves us, since forgetting is the departure of knowledge, while practising, on the contrary, by implanting a new memory in place of the one that leaves, maintains knowledge, to the point that it seems to be the same. In this way, in effect, everything mortal is preserved, not because it is always completely the same,

as divine, but because what departs and is already aged leaves <sup>b</sup> in its place something new similar to what it was. By this process, Socrates," he said, "the mortal participates in immortality, both the body and everything else; the immortal, on the other hand, participates in another way. Do not be surprised, then, if every being naturally esteems its own offspring, for because of immortality, that zeal and love accompanies every being.

G [1] When I had heard this speech, full of admiration I said:

"Well, most wise Diotima, is this truly so?" And she, like the true sophists, replied:

—Of course, Socrates, for if you wish to consider the love of

men for honours, you would also be astonished at their irrationality, unless you meditate on what I have said, considering what a terrible state they are in for the love

of becoming famous 'and leaving behind an immortal reputation'. For this reason, even more than for their children, they are willing to face all dangers, spend their money, endure any kind of fatigue and give his life. Well, do you think," he said, "that Alcestis would have died for Admetus

or that Achilles would have followed Patroclus in death, or that your Codrus would have gone ahead and died for the sake of his children's reign, if they had not believed that the immortal memory we now have of them because of their virtue would remain? Not at all," he said, "but rather, I believe, for immortal virtue and such illustrious renown, all do everything, and the better they are, the more so, for they love what is immortal. [2] Consequently, those who are fertile," he said, "according to the

body are drawn preferentially to women and in this way are lovers, seeking through the procreation of children immortality, remembrance and happiness, as they believe, for all future time. On the other hand, those who are fertile according to the soul... for there are, in fact, he said,

who conceive in souls even more than in bodies what <sup>209a</sup>

It is the soul's task to conceive and give birth. And what is their task? Knowledge and every other virtue, of which all poets and artists who are said to be inventors are precisely the creators. [3] But the greatest and most beautiful knowledge is, by far, the regulation of matters concerning cities and families,

whose name is moderation and justice. Now, when one of these is

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If he feels fertile in his soul from a young age, being of a divine nature, and, when he reaches adulthood, he desires to procreate and beget children, then I believe he also seeks beauty in his surroundings in which he can beget, for he will never beget in ugliness. Thus, because of his fertility, he is more attached to beautiful bodies than to ugly ones, and if he encounters a beautiful soul, noble and well-endowed by nature, then he shows great interest in the whole; before this person he has an abundance of reasoning about virtue, about how man should be...

- c be good and what he should practise, and tries to educate him. Indeed, by being in contact, I believe, with beauty and having a relationship with it, it gives birth to and procreates what it had long conceived, not only in its presence, but also remembering it in its absence, and in common with the beautiful object it helps to raise what has been begotten, so that those of such nature maintain among themselves a community much greater than that of children and a more solid friendship, since they have in common more beautiful and more immortal children. And everyone would prefer to have begotten such children for themselves rather than human ones, when they think about it.
- d a glance at Homer, Hesiod, and other great poets, and feel envy because they have left behind descendants who bring them immortal fame and remembrance by being immortal themselves; or if you prefer," he said, "the children left behind by Lycurgus in Lacedaemon, saviours of Lacedaemon and, so to speak, of the whole of Hellas. Solon is also honoured among you for having given rise to your laws, and many other men are honoured in many other places, both among the
- e Greeks and barbarians alike, for having produced many beautiful works and engendered all kinds of virtue. Many temples and cults have already been established in their honour by such sons, while for mortal sons none have yet been established for anyone.

H [1] These, then, are the things of love, into whose mystery even you, Socrates, might perhaps be initiated. But into the final rites and supreme revelation, for whose sake those exist, if one proceeds correctly, I do not know whether you would be able to be initiated. Therefore, I myself—

- 210a I will tell you," he said, "and I will spare no effort; try to follow me, if you can. It is necessary, in fact," he said, "that anyone who wants to follow the right path to that end should begin at a young age to turn towards beautiful bodies. And, if his guide directs him rightly, he should first fall in love with a single body and engender beautiful thoughts in it; [2] then he must understand that the beauty that exists in any
- r body is akin to that found in another and that, if it is necessary to pursue beauty of form, it is great foolishness not to consider the same beauty found in all bodies. Once you have understood this, you must become a lover of all beautiful bodies and calm that strong infatuation with just one, despising it and considering it insignificant. [3] Next, you must consider the beauty of souls to be more valuable than that of bodies, so that if someone is virtuous, you should admire them more than if they are beautiful.

beauty of souls than that of the body, so that if someone is virtuous in soul, even if they have little splendour, it will be enough to

ove them, care for them, beget them, and seek out reasoning that will make young people better, so that they will be compelled, once again, to contemplate appreciate the beauty that resides in rules of conduct and laws, and recognise that everything beautiful is related to itself, and thus consider the beauty of the body as insignificant.

[4] After the rules of conduct, he must lead him to the sciences, so that he may also see their beauty, and, fixing his gaze on that immense beauty, he may not be mediocre and short-sighted in spirit due to servile dependence, clinging like a slave to the beauty of a single being.

pirit, clinging, like a slave, to the beauty of a single being, such as that of a boy, a man or a rule of conduct, but rather, turning towards that sea of beauty and contemplating it, engender many beautiful and magnificent speeches and thoughts in unlimited love for wisdom, until, strengthened and grown, he discovers a single science, which is the science of beauty such as the following. Try now, he said, to pay me the utmost attention possible

I [1] Indeed, whoever has been instructed in the things of love, having contemplated beautiful things in orderly and correct succession, will suddenly discover, having reached the end of his amorous initiation, something wonderfully beautiful by nature, namely, Socrates, that very thing for which all the previous efforts were made, which, first of all, always exists and

is neither born nor perishes, neither grows nor decreases; secondly, it is not beautiful in 211a

neither ugly in one aspect and beautiful in another, nor sometimes beautiful and sometimes not, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another, nor beautiful here and ugly there, as if it were beautiful to some and ugly to others. [2] Nor will this beauty appear to you in the form of a face or hands or anything else that a body participates in, nor as reasoning, nor as science, nor as existing in something else, for example, in a living being, on earth, in heaven or elsewhere, but rather

beauty itself, which is always specifically unique with itself, while all other beautiful things participate in it in such a way that their birth and death cause neither increase nor decrease, nor does anything happen to it at all.

[3] Therefore, when someone ascends from the things of this world Through the pure love of young people, one begins to glimpse that beauty, and it can be said that one is nearing the end. For this is precisely the

correct way to approach the things of love or to be led by another: starting with the beautiful things here and using them as stepping stones to ascend continuously, based on that beauty, from one to two and from two to all beautiful bodies, and from beautiful bodies to beautiful rules of conduct, and from rules of conduct to beautiful knowledge, and starting from these, ending in that knowledge which is knowledge of nothing else but that which

Absolute beauty, so that you may finally know what beauty itself is.

d [4] In this period of life, dear Socrates," said the stranger from Mantinea, "more than in any other, it is worthwhile for a man to live: when he contemplates beauty itself. [5] If you ever see it, you will find that it is incomparable to gold, fine clothing, or beautiful young men and adolescents, in whose presence you now swoon and are willing, like many others, to give up eating and drinking, if possible, in order to see your beloved and be with him always, just to gaze upon him and be in his company. What, then, should we imagine, he said, if it were possible for someone to see beauty itself, pure, clean, unmixed and untainted by human flesh, colours or, in short, many other mortal trifles, and could contemplate divine beauty itself, specifically unique? [6] Do you think, he said, that the life of a man who e looks in that direction, who contemplates that beauty with what is necessary to contemplate it and lives in its company, is vain? Or do you not believe," he said, "that only then, when he sees beauty with what is visible, will it be possible for him to engender, not images of virtue, since he is not in contact 212a with an image, but true virtues, since he is in contact with the truth? [7] And he who has engendered and nurtured a true virtue, do you not think it possible for him to become a friend of the gods and, if any other man can be so, to become immortal himself?

[8] This, Phaedrus and other friends, is what Diotima said, and I was convinced; and, convinced, I also try to persuade others that, in order to acquire this possession, one could hardly find a better collaborator of human nature than Eros. Precisely for this reason, I affirm that every man should honour Eros, and not only do I myself honour the things of love and practise them exceedingly, but I also recommend them to others and now and always b praise the power and courage of Eros, to the extent that I am capable. Consider, then, Phaedrus, this speech, if you will, as a eulogy in honour of Eros, or, if you prefer, give it whatever name you like and however you like.

## CICERO

### Texts from *On the Orator* and *The Orator*

See Chapter IV, 4

*Marcus Tullius Cicero was born in Arpino on 3 January 106 BC. He was an orator, politician and philosopher in Rome. On 7 December 43 BC, he was assassinated by the henchmen of Mark Antony.*

*On the Orator is a dialogue in three books written in 55 BC. In it, Cicero does not give technical instructions for learning the art of oratory, but rather attempts to show that the ideal orator is the ideal human being who dedicates his life to the community. For its part, The Orator to Marcus Brutus is a text dedicated to his young friend Marcus Brutus and written in 46 BC. Here, Cicero sets out the ideal image of the orator, in opposition to the rise of Atticism, which he considered to be an impoverishment.*

1. De oratore, II, § 193-194 [Spanish translation by José Javier Iso in: Cicero, On the Orator, Madrid, Gredos, 2002, pp. 288-289].

*One of the methods used by orators to sway their listeners towards their opinion is to provoke permotiones animorum, or certain feelings. This influence on feelings is only possible if the orator himself is truly moved, if his words spring from a deep inner emotion.*

Theme: *to achieve its goal, even what is invented must arise from genuine inner emotion.*

[...] but, as I was saying, so that this does not seem strange to us, what could be further from reality than poetry, the stage, a play? And yet I have often seen in such performances how, through the mask, the eyes of what is ultimately an actor seemed to burn when he said: 193

*Have you dared to separate him from you or to enter Salamis without him?  
Have you not feared your father's countenance either?*

And whenever he uttered that word, "countenance," I could not help but see Telamon, filled with rage and driven mad by the death of his son; and he himself, his voice breaking in a pitiful tone:

*when, at the end of my life, destitute  
of children, you tore me apart, you deprived me, you extinguished me; neither  
of the death of your brother nor of his young son, whom they entrusted to  
your care*

he seemed to say between tears and sobs. And if that actor, despite performing every day, could not portray the scene without pain, why do you think Pacuvio, when writing it, maintained a state of

194 A gentle and calm disposition? That could not be the case. For I have heard more than once – and they say that Democritus and Plato left it in their works – that there can be no good poet without fire within and a certain touch of madness.

2. De oratore, III, § 178-181 [pp. 461-462].

*Craso wants to show that rhythmic organisation cannot be artificially imposed on discourse (especially at the end of sentences or clauses), but rather that it must be (like all beauty) necessary by nature. That is why he makes this digression.*

Theme: *the most useful is also the most beautiful.*

Structure: [1] *As everywhere else, in discourse too, what is most useful is also what is most dignified and elegant.* [2] *The universe is ordered according to very subtle necessary laws, and thanks to this it is very beautiful.* [3] *Likewise, in the various realms of nature, nothing is random, and everything is beautiful.* [4] *In human works, too, beauty is a consequence of usefulness, and yet beauty exists in itself.* [5] *The same is true of the beauty of speech.*

178 [1] But just as nature itself has incredibly managed in many things to ensure that what is most beneficial also presents great decorum and often charm, so too in language. [2] And we see that – for the safety and salvation of all – the balance of this entire universe and of nature consists in the sky surrounding it and the earth being in the middle and maintaining itself by virtue of its own inclination, the sun revolving around it, approaching the winter sign and from there gradually rising to the opposite side; and that, in relation to its proximity and distance from the sun, the moon receives light; and that five stars follow the same path with different movements and trajectories.

Such arrangements maintain such a balance that, if they were to change even slightly,

179, it could not be restored, and such beauty that one could not even imagine a more beautiful spectacle. [3] Now turn your attention to the form and figure of man or even of other living beings. You will see that no part of their body is shaped without

there is any need for it, and that its form, as a whole, is finished as if by artistic design, not by chance. And what about trees? In trees, neither the trunk nor the branches nor the leaves have any function other than to preserve their being, and yet nowhere do any of their parts cease to have their charm.

[4] Let us leave the world of nature and turn to the arts. What is there in a ship that is as necessary as its sides, its frames, its bow, its stern, its antennas, its masts? And yet they have a charm when you look at them, as if they were designed not only for safety but also for pleasure. Columns support temples and porticos; however, they serve no purpose other than to impress. It was not grace but necessity that built the eaves of the Capitol roof and those of other temples; for once it had been calculated how the water could be collected from the two slopes, the nobility of its design followed the usefulness of its roof, so that even if the Capitol had been raised into the sky, where there can be no rain, it gives the impression that without its roof it could not have maintained its majesty.

[5] And this occurs in all aspects of discourse, so that a certain elegance and grace follows what is useful and little less than necessary.

3. Orator, § 8-10 [*Spanish translation by E. Sánchez Salor in: Cicero, El orador, Madrid, Alianza, 1991, pp. 34-35.*]

*Cicero wants to once again expound his ideal of an orator against the emerging purist Atticism, and in the prologue he emphasises that this ideal of an orator is not perfectly realised in this world (nothing is perfect). A digression ensues.*

Theme: *Ideas are the models in art and in all becoming.*

Structure: [1] *All sensory beauty is surpassed by the model of beauty that we see spiritually.* [2] *This model of beauty is the model of both the visual artist and the orator.* [3] *These models (Plato's ideas) are eternal and indestructible; they are the primordial form of all earthly phenomena.*

[1] In any case, I maintain that in no genre is there anything so beautiful that it is not surpassed by that from which it is taken, as a portrait is taken, so to speak, from a face; this cannot be perceived by the eyes, nor by the ears, nor by any sense; we only understand it with our thoughts and our minds. Thus, we can imagine works more beautiful than the statues of Phidias, more perfect than which

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we see that there is nothing in sculptural art, and that the paintings I have mentioned; and this despite the fact that when that artist created his model of Jupiter or Minerva, he had no one before his eyes to serve as a model, but rather it was in his own mind that there was a kind of extraordinary image of beauty, which he contemplated and fixed upon, directing his art and his hand towards its imitation.

[2] Well, just as in the forms and figures [of the plastic arts] there is something perfect and extraordinary, to whose image, ideal, everything that does not enter the domain of sight refers, through imitation, so too do we contemplate in our spirit

10 the ideal, and we seek with our ears the image of eloquence. [3] These forms of things are called "ideas" by that profound author and master, not only of thought but also of oratory, Plato; and he says that they are not engendered; he affirms that they have always existed and are contained in our reason and intelligence; other things are born, die, flow, pass, and do not remain long in a single state. Thus, anything that is dealt with using a rational method must have as its point of reference the ultimate form and image of its kind.

## HORACE

### **Texts from *Ars poetica* and *Epistle to Augustus***

See chapter IV, 7

*Quintus Horatius Flaccus was born on 8 December 65 BC and, along with Virgil, was the most important Roman poet of the Augustan era. In 38 BC, he was welcomed into Maecenas' circle and died a few months after Maecenas, on 27 November 8 BC.*

1. *Ars Poetica*, 1-13, 38-63, 73, 99-113, 125-135, 153-155, 333-340, 391-406 [Spanish translation by José Luis Moralejo in: *Horace*, *Satires. Epistles. Ars Poetica*, Madrid, Gredos, 2008, pp. 383-384, 386-387, 388, 389-390, 391, 392-393, 403, 406-407].

*Horace wrote Ars Poetica or Epistula ad Pisones probably in 17 or 16 BC. In an associative style, he sets out rules for young Roman poets and his thoughts on the state of Roman poetry. The recipients (the Pisones) cannot be identified with certainty.*

Theme: *nature and art.*

Structure: [1] *Art cannot arbitrarily disregard the laws of nature.* [2] *Choosing the subject well, in accordance with the author's abilities, is the prerequisite for writing well.* [3] *The poet's language requires careful selection of words, their peculiar placement, and neologisms.* [4] *Words are subject to the ephemeral nature of all things human.* [5] *The ancient Greek poets are the model for the correct organisation of the subject matter.* [6] *In addition to being beautiful, for which it must meticulously respect the external rules of art, a poem must be moving.* [7] *This emotion is only possible if the artist himself is moved.* [8] *The difficulty in inventing a subject matter lies in creating individual characters.* [9] *A subject that has already been dealt with should not be reproduced literally, but must be presented in a truly new way.* [10] *Characters must be described naturally and in keeping with their age.* [11] *The poet's goals are profit and entertainment; profit is obtained by indoctrinating briefly and sticking to the plausible.* [12] *The singer brings culture and maintains the community.*

1 [1] If a painter wants to attach a horse's neck to a human head and adorn a  
jumble of limbs of various origins with different feathers, so that what is a  
beautiful woman above is topped off with a horrible black fish, would those  
invited to see such a spectacle be able to bear it?

5 , my friends, the laughter?

Believe me, Pisones, that painting will be very similar to the book in which,  
just like in the dreams of a sick person, vain images are depicted, in which the  
feet and head do not correspond to the same figure. "Painters and poets have  
always had the same right

10 to dare to do whatever they please. We know this, and we ask for this licence  
and grant it on our part; but not so that ferocious beasts may be put together  
with tame animals, not so that snakes may be paired with birds

13 or tigers with lambs. [...]

38 [2] Those of you who write, choose the subject matter that suits your  
abilities, and think long and hard about what you refuse and what you can  
bear.

40 your shoulders. Those who choose a subject for which they have energy will  
not lack either eloquence or lucid order.

Unless I am mistaken, the virtue and charm of order lie in saying now  
what must be said now, and in leaving many other

45 things for later and omitting them for the moment. [3] Furthermore, showing  
himself to be refined and prudent in weaving words together, the author of  
the promised poem must seek some things and disdain others.

You will express yourself excellently if an ingenious combination turns  
a familiar word into something new. If it is necessary to show obscure things  
by means of new symbols and create words that have not

50 heard by the Cetegos, there will be and permission will be given to use them  
with due caution. Furthermore, new words and newly coined words will have  
credibility if they come from a Greek source, sparingly used. [4] And

55 Why should the Romans grant Cecilius and Plautus what they deny Virgil and  
Varro? Why should I be frowned upon for making a small profit, when the  
language of Cato and Ennius enriched the mother tongue and introduced new  
words? It has been and always will be

60 It is lawful to bring to light a name that bears the stamp of time. Just as from  
one year to the next the forests change their leaves and the first ones fall, so  
the generation of old words perishes, and, like young people, those that have  
been born recently flourish and gain vigour. We and everything

63 what is ours is a debt to be paid to death. [...]

73 [5] Homer made it clear with what rhythms the deeds of kings and  
champions and the disastrous wars could be sung.

[...]

99 [6] It is not enough for poems to be beautiful: they must have charm and  
carry the reader's spirit wherever they please. [7] Just as they laugh with those  
who laugh, so they weep with those who weep, the human faces...

nos. If you want to make me cry, you must first hurt yourself; then your  
misfortune will make me suffer, whether you are Telephus or Peleus; but if  
you play your part badly, I will fall asleep or I will laugh. A sad face suits  
bitter words; an angry face, words full of threats; a joking face, jokes; and  
a stern face, serious words. For nature first prepares us inwardly for every kind  
of fortune: it fills us with joy or drives us to anger, or else it overwhelms  
us with grief and fills us with anguish; then it brings the emotions of the soul to  
light, and the tongue acts as its interpreter. If the words of the speaker do not  
match his fortune, Roman knights and commoners alike will burst out  
laughing.

[...]

[8] If you bring something untouched to the scene, and dare to forge a  
new character, keep it as it appeared at the beginning and make it consistent.  
It is difficult to say in your own words what is common heritage, and you  
will do better to turn the poem of Ilion into action than to bring to light  
unknown stories that no one has ever told. [9] Public matters will be your  
private domain if you do not remain stuck in the vulgar circuit that everyone  
else travels; do not pretend that every word will be picked up by another  
word, like a faithful interpreter, nor, if you are going to imitate, get yourself  
into a predicament from which shame or the law of that genre will prevent  
you from extricating yourself.

[...]

[10] Listen to what I, and with me the people, miss: if what you need is a  
spectator willing to applaud, who waits for the curtain to fall and remains  
seated until the singer says 'Applause!'. You must observe the behaviours typical  
of each age and give the characters, which vary over the years, the traits that  
suit them.

[...]

[11] Poets aim either to be useful or to provide entertainment; or else to  
speak of things that are both pleasant and good for life. Whenever you give a  
precept, be brief, so that, said in a short time, things are received by minds  
with docility and faithfully kept; for everything superfluous overflows from a  
mind already saturated. What is invented to delight must be plausible: do not  
pretend that the fable can create whatever it wants, and do not have a lamia  
who has just eaten a child pull a living child out of her womb.

[...]

[12] Orpheus, priest and spokesman for the gods, made savage men  
abandon their killings and their repugnant livelihood, and for this reason it is  
said of him that he tamed tigers and rabid lions; it is also said that Amphion,  
founder of the city of Thebes, moved stones to the sound of his lyre and carried  
them wherever he wanted with his sweet pleas. This was the wisdom of old: to  
separate the public from the private, the sacred from the profane; to prohibit  
promiscuity in carnal relations, subjecting the

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marriage according to the law; in building cities and engraving laws on wood.  
400 Thus honour and fame came to the divine poets and their poems. After them,  
the illustrious Homer and Tyrtæus sharpened the souls of men for the wars  
of Mars. The answers of the soothsayers were given in verse, and people were  
taught how to walk through life. The Pierian rhythms were also used to seek  
the friendship of kings, and the spectacle was invented, which was a respite  
405 from so many tasks. Do not be ashamed, then, of the muse skilled in the lyre  
or of Apollo the singer.

2. Epistle to Augustus (*Ep. II, 1*), 119-138 [Spanish translation by José Luis Moralejo in: *Horace, Satires. Epistles. Poetic Art, Madrid, Gre-dos, 2008, pp. 313-314*].

*This epistle was addressed to Augustus in 14 BC after the emperor had requested a letter on literary matters. It begins with praise for the statesman, continues with a critique of the state of poetry in Rome, and ends with praise for the poet within the state.*

Theme: *the passion and mission of the poet.*

Structure: [1] *The poet's passion is directed towards verse, not external possessions.* [2] *His usefulness to the state: educating children and training young people.* [3] *His religious duty: appeasing the gods and imploring their blessing.*

[1] Now then, what great advantages does this misdemeanour, this brief  
madness, bring? Calculate it this way: it is unlikely that the poet has a miserly  
119 character: he loves verse and concentrates all his efforts on it; he laughs off  
losses – runaway slaves or fires; he does not plot frauds to the detriment of his  
partner or the boy under his tutelage; [2] he lives on vegetables and second-  
rate bread; and although he is weak and of little use in war, he is useful to the  
city, if you will admit this: that small things also help big things. The poet  
shapes the tender tongue of the still stammering child; from that moment on, he  
turns his ear away from obscene words, and then, moreover, educates his soul  
with beneficial precepts, corrects harshness, envy and anger; he remembers good  
125 deeds, and instructs the rising generations with well-known examples; he  
comforts the needy and the sorrowful. From whom would the young woman  
who knows no husband and the spotless boys learn their prayers if the muse had  
not given them a poet? [3] The choir begs for divine help and feels the gods  
present; it implores the waters of heaven, making itself pleasing with learned  
prayer; it wards off diseases and conjures away fearsome dangers, and  
implores peace and a year full of fruit. With verses the heavenly gods are  
130 appeased, with verses the manes.

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## VITRUVIUS

### Texts from *Ten Books on Architecture*

See chapter IV, 6

*Marcus Vitruvius Pollio was an architect in Rome during the 1st century BC. He wrote his work De architectura libri decem between 25 and 23 BC and dedicated it to Augustus.*

1. *Book I, 2* [translation by Francisco Manzanero Cano in: *Vitruvius, Architecture. Books I-V, Madrid, Gredos, 2008, pp. 155-168*].

Theme: *the goal of architecture is symmetry of parts and functionality.*

Structure: [1] *The six fundamentals of architecture.* [2] *The arrangement of the parts of a building according to their dimensions.* [3] *The distribution of the necessary space with reflection and inventiveness.* [4] *Eurythmy: the correct proportion between the parts.* [5] *Symmetry: the correct proportion of a part to the whole.* [6] *Decorum based on convention: a temple must correspond stylistically to its god.* [7] *Decorum based on tradition: unity of style within a building.* [8] *Natural decorum: the building as a whole and each of its parts must correspond to its purpose.* [9] *Materials must be chosen according to what is available in that place and the purpose of the building.*

[1] Architecture consists of order – which in Greek is called táxis—, structuring—which the Greeks often call diáthesis—, eurhythmy, symmetry, decorum, and good administration—which in Greek is called oikonomía. 1

[2] Order is the conformity in the proportions of the members of a work separately and, considered as a whole, the adequacy of their proportion to symmetry; order is based on quantification, which in Greek is called *posôtes*. In turn, quantification consists of the adoption of modules extracted from the members of the work itself and is also the execution of the whole work consistent with each of the aliquot parts of its members. 2

[3] Structuring consists of the appropriate placement of the parts and, by virtue of their combinations, the elegant execution of the

work in keeping with its category. The projections representing the structure – called *idéai* in Greek – are as follows: *ichnography*, *orthography* and *scenography*.

An *ichnography* is a work done in proportion by coordinating the compass and the ruler, from which the details of the plans can be reproduced on the surfaces of the plots.

An *orthography*, in turn, is an elevation image of the façade, and is also a proportionally represented figure, corresponding to the dimensions of the work being designed.

Similarly, a *scenography* is a shaded design of the façade and sides, which gives a sense of distance, and also consists of the correspondence of all lines with the fixed point of the compass.

These projections are the result of reflection and inventiveness. Reflection is a task that requires a great deal of effort and dedication, as well as a great deal of sleepless nights spent working towards the successful completion of a project. Inventiveness, in turn, is the ability to explain obscure issues and quickly find solutions to new problems. These are the definitions of the types of structuring.

3 [4] Eurythmy consists of beautiful appearance and coherence in terms of the arrangement of its members. This occurs when the members of the work are of a height proportionate to their width, and of a width proportionate to their length, and, ultimately, when all of them respond to the generality of their specific symmetry.

4 [5] Similarly, symmetry is the concordance of proportions between the members of the same work and also the relationship between the parts considered separately and the general configuration of their mass. Just as in the human body the symmetrical nature of eurythmy derives from the elbow, the foot, the palm, the finger and other smaller divisions, so it is in the execution of works. Firstly, in temples, the calculation for symmetry is taken from the diameter of the columns, or the triglyph, or even the *embasement*; in ballistae, it is taken from the hole that the Greeks usually call *peritretos*; in ships, from *the interscalmium* – called *dipechyaía* – and so on with elements of other constructed things.

5 [6] Decorum, on the other hand, consists of the impeccable appearance of the work, which is composed of elements in keeping with its dignity. This is achieved by convention – what in Greek is called *thematismói* – by tradition or by nature. By convention, when buildings are erected to Jupiter Fulgor and Heaven, as well as to the Sun and Moon, they shall be established in the open and *hypeteros*; for both the statues of these gods and their auspicious signs are seen in the open air and in full light. For Minerva, Mars and Hercules, Doric temples will be built; indeed, due to their vigorous nature, it is fitting that buildings free of refinement be erected for these gods. If Corinthian temples are built for Venus, Flora, Proserpina and the nymphs of the springs, ten-

In my opinion, they will have the ideal attributes, since these deities will find that graceful works full of flourishes, adorned with leaves and volutes, enhance the proper decorum thanks to their delicacy. If Ionic temples are built for Juno, Diana, Father Liber and the other gods of the same nature, the requirement of moderation will be met, since the standard that defines them will combine the austere character of the Doric and the delicacy of the Corinthian.

[7] According to tradition, decorum manifests itself as such when a building with magnificent interiors also has elegant lobbies to match. Of course, if the interiors offer

They look elegant, whereas the entrances appear humble and ordinary, which is not in keeping with decorum. For the same reason, if denticles were carved on the cornices of Doric architraves, or if the triglyphs of Ionic architraves were placed on top of columns with rusticated capitals, transferring the characteristics of one style to a different type of work, the appearance would suffer because there are already established traditions for each order.

[8] There will be natural decorum if, to begin with, all the enclosures <sup>sa</sup> 7  
The healthiest locations and springs with the most suitable waters are sought out for the sites where their shrines are established, especially in the case of Aesculapius and Salus and those gods whose healing powers seem to cure the greatest number of sick people. This is because if patients are moved from an unhealthy place to a healthy one and given water from a healthy spring, they will recover more quickly. Thus, by taking advantage of the nature of the place, the deity will gain greater fame and see it increase in accordance with its dignity. Likewise, there will be natural decorum if the bedrooms and libraries receive light from the east, the bathrooms and winter rooms from the winter west, and the art galleries and rooms that require constant lighting from the north, since that side is neither illuminated nor shaded by the sun's trajectory, but remains constantly unchanged throughout the day.

[9] Good administration consists of the proper management of <sup>8</sup>  
local resources and control of the construction budget without exceeding reasonable limits. This will generally be observed if the architect does not seek materials that cannot be found or purchased except at a high price. Of course, there is not an abundance of mine sand, pebbles, fir wood, saplings or marble everywhere, but rather some materials are found in one place and others in another, and their transport is problematic and expensive. However, where there is no mine sand, river or sea sand can be used, provided it is washed beforehand; the lack of fir wood or sapinos can also be remedied by using cypress, poplar, elm or pine; other shortages will have to be solved in a similar way.

- 9 The next step in good administration will be taken if the buildings are well suited to the needs of the owners and their economic situation or to the position afforded them by their eloquence. And, of course, it is clear that urban properties will have to be built in one way, and those where the harvests from rural properties end up in another; they will not be the same for moneylenders as for the powerful and the refined; as for magistrates, thanks to whose reflections the state is governed, buildings will be located according to their function. In short, when it comes to buildings, good administration must be carried out by adapting them to all categories of people.

2. *Book III, 1 [pp. 294–299, 301–303].*

Topic: *the human body as a model of measurement, number and symmetry.*

Structure: [1] *A temple is based on the symmetry of its parts in relation to each other and to the whole.* [2] *The symmetrical proportions of the parts of the human body.* [3] *This symmetry must also be applied to buildings, especially temples.* [4] *The measurements and numbers are taken from the human body.*

- 1 [1] The composition of temples is based on symmetry, a system of relationships that architects must master perfectly. This, in turn, is the result of proportion, which in Greek is called *analogy*. Proportion is the adaptation of individual elements to a fixed module throughout the entire work; from this, the system of symmetries is obtained. No temple can have a structural system without symmetry and proportion if it does not present, as in the case of a well-formed man, a precise system of relationships between its members.
- 2 [2] Nature has certainly structured the human body in such a way that the face, from the chin to the top of the forehead and the hairline, constitutes one tenth of it, and the open hand, from the wrist to the tip of the middle finger, another tenth; the head, from the chin to the crown, is one-eighth, and, including the base of the neck, from the top of the chest to the hairline, one-sixth; from the centre of the chest to the crown, one-quarter. On the other hand, one third of the height of the face itself is the distance from the tip of the chin to the base of the nose; the nose measures the same distance from its base to the centre of the eyebrows; from that point to the hairline, the forehead also equals one third of the face. As for the foot, it is equivalent to one sixth of the height of the body; the elbow, to one quarter; the chest, also to one quarter. The other limbs are likewise

specific proportions of commensuration, which notable painters and sculptors of antiquity also applied, garnering great and enduring praise.

Similarly, members of temples must maintain a <sup>3</sup> the most accurate correspondence possible between each of its parts and the total volume of its overall mass. Similarly, the centre of the body is by nature the navel; and, in fact, if a man is placed lying on his back with his hands and feet stretched out, and the fixed point of the compass is placed on his navel, when a circle is drawn, the line will touch the fingers of both feet and hands. It is no less true that just as the figure of a circumference is formed around the body, so too will the outline of a square be discovered around it. Indeed, if one measures from the soles of the feet to the top of the head, and compares the resulting measurement with that covered by the outstretched hands, one will discover that the width is identical to the height, as is the case with surfaces that have the exact shape of a square.

[3] Therefore, if nature has structured the human body

<sup>4</sup> in such a way that its limbs correspond proportionally to its entire figure, it is clear that the ancients have established

with legitimate cause that, in the execution of architectural works, these also comply with the requirement that there be proportionality between each of their members and the configuration of their entire mass. And so, although they bequeathed us principles that are valid for all kinds of works, they were especially so for the temples of the gods, since both the praise and the criticism that such works deserve tend to last forever.

[4] The units of measurement, which are obviously <sup>5</sup> essential in any work, were derived by the ancients from parts of the body – such as the finger, the palm, the foot and the elbow – and distributed in the perfect number, which the Greeks called *téleos*. The ancients established the number called 'ten' as perfect; and, in fact, it was inferred from the hands, by the total number of fingers. But if ten is perfect by nature, as seen in the fingers of both hands, Plato even believed that this number was perfect for a specific reason, because with ten individual elements, which the Greeks called *monads*, a dozen is formed; on the other hand, when eleven or twelve are put together, which already exceed it, they cannot constitute a perfect number until they reach the second ten, since each unit is a small portion of that number.

[...]

Needless to say, it was because the man's foot measures a size six. <sup>7</sup> of his height – also expressed as follows: because perfect height is set at six times the measurement of the foot – so they instituted six as perfect and observed that one cubit is equivalent to six palms and

twenty-four fingers. Apparently, this is also why Greek cities, considering that an elbow is equivalent to six palms, subdivided the drachma – their currency – into bronze coins such as the asses: six like the latter, which they call obols, and, in correlation with the fingers that it is worth, they set a value for the drachma of twenty-four quadrants of an obol, coins that some call *dichalka* and others *trichalka*.

8 Our people, for their part, initially designated the ancient number as perfect, and set a value of ten asses for the denarius, which is why the form of its name retains the meaning of 'ten-piece' to this day. And even its quarter, which consisted of two asses and a semis, they agreed to call a sestertius. But after they came to the conclusion that both numbers, six and ten, were perfect, they combined them into one and designated sixteen as the most perfect possible. On the other hand, to make this decision, they took the foot as a model, because if you take two palms away from the elbow, you are left with a foot, with four palms, and the palm in turn measures four fingers. Thus, it turns out that the foot measures sixteen fingers, and the denarius is worth as many bronze asses.

9 Therefore, if we accept that measurements were discovered based on the extremities of the human body and that there is a correspondence in the measurement of the limbs separately with respect to the figure of the body as a whole, we can only admire those builders who, even when erecting temples to the immortal gods, arranged the members of their works in such a way that their distribution was harmonious in proportion and symmetry, both separately and as a whole.

## SENECA

### **Texts from *Letters to Lucilius***

See chapter IV, 3

*Lucius Annaeus Seneca was born in 4 or 5 BC in Cordoba (Spain) and took his own life in 65 AD, encouraged by his former disciple and friend Nero. The letters to Lucilius (Epistulae morales ad Lucilium), of which 124 have been preserved, were written around 63 AD, after he had been expelled from Nero's court; they deal with ethical issues from a Stoic point of view.*

1. *Epistle 58, § 16-21 [English translation by Ismael Roca Meliá in: Seneca, Moral Epistles to Lucilius. I: Books I-IX, Epistles 1-80, Madrid, Gredos, 1986, pp. 330-332].*

Theme: *idea and image in the work of art.*

Structure: [1] *The first three forms of being in Plato.* [2] *Models of nature and art.* [3] *Difference between the model (the idea) and the form of the realised figure (eidos) in the work of art.*

[1] Now I return to the subject I promised to elucidate: how Plato divides 16  
everything that exists into six categories. In the first is that principle, called 'that which is' [*quod est*], which is not perceptible either by sight or by touch, nor with any sense: it can only be conceived. What is universal, such as the genus man, is not visible to the eye, but the specific man is, e.g. Cicero and Cato. The animal as a genus is not seen, it is conceived. But we do contemplate its species: the horse, the dog.

In the second category of things that exist, Plato places the being 17  
that exceeds and surpasses all reality; of this he says that it exists par excellence. Poet is a common appellation, for all those who compose verses are designated by this name; but among the Greeks it was already applied as a distinctive name for one alone: you think of Homer when you hear "the poet" said. So what is this Being? Of course, it is God, greater and more powerful than all beings combined.

The third category corresponds to beings that have an existence of their own; these are innumerable, but located outside our visible world. What are they, you ask? They constitute the peculiarity of Plato's system; he calls them ideas, from which all things are produced 18

; these are innumerable, but located outside our visible world. What are they, you ask? They constitute the peculiarity of Plato's system; he calls them ideas, from which all the things we see are produced and in whose image all things without exception are modelled. They are immortal, immutable, invulnerable.

19 Listen to what the idea is, or rather, what Plato understands it to be: 'The idea is the eternal model of everything that nature produces'. [2] I will add an explanation to the definition to make the proposition clearer to you: I propose to paint your portrait. As a model for the painting, I have you, from whom I draw inspiration for certain features to reflect in my work. Thus, that figure that instructs and inspires me, from which I draw my imitation, is the idea. Well, nature has an infinite number of such models, of men, fish, trees, according to which it configures everything it must produce.

20 [3] The fourth category will be for the *idos* [σιδος]. It is advisable to consider what the *idos* consists of and attribute to Plato, not to me, the difficulty of the concept, since there is no subtlety that does not entail difficulty. A little earlier, I used the example of the painter. When he wanted to capture Virgil with his colours, he contemplated his person. The idea was Virgil's face, that is, the model for the future work; what the artist captures from him and uses for his work is the *idos*.

21 Where is the difference, you ask? The first is the model, the second is the form taken from the model and captured in the work; the first form is imitated by the artist, the second constitutes his work. The statue possesses a specific figure; this is the *idos*. The model itself, which the sculptor imitated to create the statue, also possesses a specific figure; this is the idea. There is yet another difference, if you wish: the *idos* is in the work, the idea is outside the work, and it is not only extrinsic to the work, but also prior to it.

## 2. Epistle 58, § 25-28 [pp. 334-335].

Topic: *the usefulness of this reflection.*

Structure: [1] *How can Platonic ideas make me a better person?* [2] *They lead us from the ephemeral, from the figure to which our desire is directed, to the imperishable, to the idea.*

25 [1] "What good will all this subtlety do me?" you insist. Since you ask, nothing. But, just as the chiseller, whose eyes are tired from constant work, finds relief and recreation and, as they say, revives them, so too must we, from time to time, relax our spirit and recreate it with some amusement. But let those same amusements constitute an occupation; from it too, if you look closely, you will be able to extract healthy effects.

26 This, dear Lucilius, is what I usually do: from all knowledge, even if it is completely unrelated to philosophy, I strive to extract something useful for myself. "What could be more foreign to moral reform than the topics we have just studied? How can Platonic ideas improve me? What conclusions can I draw from such an exposition to suppress my pa-

sessions? [2] At least this one specifically: that everything that enslaves the senses, that excites and provokes us, Plato does not admit to be counted among the things that have authentic reality.

These things are therefore fictitious; for a time they offer a certain appearance, but there is nothing stable or solid about them. Nevertheless, we desire them as if they were to last forever or as if we were to possess them forever. Weak and perishable, we linger amid vanities. Let us project our soul towards realities.

that are eternal. Let us admire the original forms of all beings fluttering through the sky; and God who lives among them and who foresees the way to offer beings that he could not make immortal, because matter opposed it, his protection against death and triumph through reason over the defects of their bodies.

The totality of beings therefore subsists, not because they are eternal, but because they are protected by their guide's request; for if they were immortal, they would not need protection. Their creator preserves them by dominating the fragility of matter with his power. We despise all creatures, to such an extent that they are devoid of value that it is doubtful whether they really exist.

### 3. *Epistle 65, § 1-14 [pp. 358-363].*

Theme: *On cause and matter. The artist's production; external image and internal image.*

Structure: [1] *Introduction: this is a discussion.* [2] *The Stoic theory: art as imitation of nature. In both there is something from which something arises (matter) and something through which it arises (the cause).* [3] *Aristotle's theory: four causes: matter, creator, form and end; exemplified by the emergence of the work of art.* [4] *Plato has a fifth cause: the eternal and immutable model according to which something is created. The artist's model may be inside or outside him.*

[5] *Parallel between the creation of art and the creation of nature.* [6] *The various causes of Plato and Aristotle are only parts of the single efficient cause: reason, both in nature and in art.*

[1] Yesterday I spent the day battling illness: the morning was taken up by <sup>1</sup> She reserved it for herself, but gave the afternoon to me. So, first of all, I tested my spirit with reading; then, since it had tolerated it well, I dared to demand, or rather, allow it more activity. I wrote a few lines, with greater attention, certainly, than I usually give when I have to tackle a difficult subject and do not want to let myself be defeated; until some friends arrived with the aim of dissuading me and reprimanding me, as one does with a recalcitrant patient.

The role of the pen was replaced by conversation, of which I will reveal to you

<sup>2</sup>

I will reveal that part which is still in dispute. We chose you as

arbitrator. You have a greater task than you think: there are three aspects to the issue.

[2] As you know, our Stoics assert that there are two principles in nature that give rise to all beings: cause and matter. Matter lies inert, a reality open to any mutation, which would be inactive if no one moved it; on the other hand, cause, that is, reason, shapes matter, transforms it in the way it wants; from it, it produces its various works. Therefore, there must be the principle that something is produced and also the principle that produces it: this is the cause, that is the matter.

3 All art is an imitation of nature; therefore, what I said about the universe applies to the works that man sets out to create. A statue requires both the material that is subjected to the sculptor's work and the sculptor who shapes the material. In the case of the statue, the material was bronze and the cause was the sculptor. This is the condition of all things: they consist of an element that is worked and the craftsman who works it.

4 [3] The Stoics believe that there is only one cause: the action of the craftsman. According to Aristotle, the cause is defined in three ways: "the first cause," he says, "is the material itself, without which nothing can be made; the second is the craftsman; the third is the form that is imprinted on each work, as on the statue; this is what Aristotle calls *idos* [σιδος]. "A fourth," he continues, "is added to these: the end of the whole work."

5 I will explain his reasoning to you. Bronze is the primary cause of the statue, for it would never have been created if the material to cast and shape it had not existed. The second cause is the sculptor, because that bronze could not have been shaped into a statue without the collaboration of skilled hands. The third cause is the form, for such a statue would not be called 'the Doryphoros' or 'the Diadoumenos' if it had not been given that particular shape. The fourth cause is the purpose of the work, because without it the statue would not have been made.

6 What is the purpose? What has driven the sculptor, what has kept him at his work: whether it be money, if he has sculpted to sell; whether it be glory, if he worked for fame; whether it be religion, if he made the statue as an offering for a temple. Thus, the cause is also that for which a thing is done; do you not think that among the causes of the work done, one must include that without which the work would not have been done?

7 [4] To these, Plato adds a fifth, the exemplar, which he calls "idea"; this is the model that the sculptor has before his eyes in order to achieve what he set out to do. But it does not matter whether he has this model outside himself, to which he can direct his gaze, or inside himself, imagined and constituted by himself. A god has these models of all things within himself: with his mind he grasped the numerical proportions and measurements of everything he was to create; he is filled with those figures that Plato calls ideas, immortal, immutable, tireless. Thus, men perish, but

The idea of humanity, according to which man is modelled, subsists and, while men toil and perish, it suffers no detriment.

According to Plato, there are five causes: that from which (matter), that by which (artificer), that in which (form), that according to which (model), that in view of which (end); and finally, the work that results from the combination of all of them. [5] For example, in the statue – since that is what we began talking about – that from which is bronze; that by which is the craftsman; that in which is the form. that is imprinted on it; that according to which the copy imitates the sculptor; that in view of which it is the end of the craftsman; what results from all these causes is the statue itself.

The world, too, as Plato says, has all these causes: the maker, that is God; the element of which it is made, visible matter; the form, the arrangement and order of the world, which we contemplate; the model, undoubtedly, the model according to which God realised the greatness of this beautiful work; the purpose, the motivation behind his work.

Do you want to know what end God proposed? Goodness. Indeed, as Plato affirms: "What was the motive that prompted God to make the world? God is good; he who is good does not envy anyone else's good ; he therefore made it as best he could."

Come on, then, judge, pass sentence and declare who you think is saying the most plausible thing, not the most true thing; for this is as far beyond our capacity as truth itself.

[6] This set of causes proposed by Aristotle and Plato encompasses too many or too few. Because if they call everything without which a thing cannot be done an efficient cause, they have proposed too few. Among the causes, include time: nothing can be done without time. Include place: if there is no place to do a thing, it cannot be done either. Include movement: without it, nothing is produced nor destroyed; without movement there is no art or change.

But now we are investigating the first and general cause. This must be simple, for matter is also simple. Shall we investigate what the cause is? It is evident that it is the creative reason, that is, God; for all these things that you have proposed are not many causes distinct from one another, but depend on a single one, the efficient cause.

Do you claim that form is a cause? This is imprinted by the craftsman on the work: it is part of the cause, not a cause. Nor is the model a cause, but a necessary instrument of the cause; it is necessary to the craftsman. Just as the chisel and the file; without these tools, art cannot be produced; however, they are not part of art, nor are they causes.

"The artist's purpose," it is argued, "the reason why he devotes himself to a work, that is the cause." Assuming that it is a cause, it is not the efficient cause, but an accessory one. Now, these are innumerable; we investigate the general cause. But the assertion that the entire universe, a finished work, was a cause did not respond to the usual acuity of the philosophers themselves; for there is a great difference between the work and the cause of the work.

## PLUTARCH

### Texts from *How Young People Should Listen to Poetry*

See chapter IV, 2

*Plutarch (c. 46–127 AD) was a philosopher, natural scientist, and orator. He was born in Chaeronea, where he eventually established his own school. There is an incomplete list of 277 works by Plutarch.*

Quomodo adulescens poetas audire debeat, 15 D - 16 D and 17 F - 18 D [Spanish translation by José García López in: *Plutarch, Moral and Customary Works (Moralia)*, vol. I, Madrid, Gredos, 1992, pp. 92-95, 99-101].

Topic: *Poetry is dangerous, so your works should not be read without guidance.*

Structure: A. *Poets lie. [1] Should young people avoid harmful poetry altogether, or is it enough to guide them well? [2] We should not condemn everything, but only remove what is harmful. [3] Beauty must be linked to philosophy, so that what is pleasant is linked to what is beneficial.*

*[4] To delight us, poets place the plausible in the place of the true. [5] Harm can be avoided by not blindly believing poets.*

B. *Even when represented beautifully, the immoral is immoral. [1] Like painting, poetry is only an imitative art. [2] What is praiseworthy in painting when it imitates the immoral is not what is imitated, but the perfection of the imitation. [3] Nor does the immoral become beautiful in poetry when it is imitated accurately, but only the art of imitation should be praised.*

- 15D A [1] Indeed, by covering the ears of young people, like those of the Itacese, with something hard and with wax that does not melt, are we going to force them, by hoisting the sails of Epicurus' ship, to flee and avoid the art of poetry, or rather, by preparing them for correct reasoning and binding their judgement, so that they are not led by pleasure towards evil, will we guide and watch over them? [2] *For no, not even the son of Driante, the strong Lycurgus [Iliad, VI, 130], was in his right mind, because, with many drunk and intoxicated, roaming the vineyards, he cut them down instead of bringing*
- E *them to the water sources and returning the god to his senses. "maddened," as Plato says [Laws, 773 d], "restraining him like another wise god." For the mixture of wine suppresses evil without destroying what is useful.*

Likewise, let us not cut or destroy the poetic vine of the Muses, but where excessive pleasure in fantasy inflames and enrages its mythical and dramatic side, emboldening it to become bold, let us interrupt it, repress it, and oppress it strongly; [3] but where it elegantly achieves a certain artistry and the sweetness and appeal of its language are not sterile or empty, let us introduce and mix in philosophy. For just as mandrake, growing with vines and transmitting its strength to wine, makes the lethargy of those who drink it more gentle, so poetry, receiving its reasoning from philosophy and presenting it mixed with fables, offers young people a light and pleasant teaching. Therefore, those who are going to devote themselves to philosophy should not shy away from poetry, but should begin to philosophise in poetry, accustoming themselves to seeking and loving what is useful in pleasure, and if they do not succeed, to fighting and rejecting it. For this is the principle of education, according to Sophocles:

F

*If one starts any job well,  
it is only natural that you will achieve a similar outcome.* [fr. 747]

16A

[4] First, then, let us introduce young people to poetry, without them having anything to worry about so much and within their reach as the fact that 'poets lie a lot' [Solon, fr. 21 D], sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally. Intentionally, because in order to give pleasure and delight to the ear, which is what most of them pursue, they consider the truth to be more austere than lies. For the truth, occurring in reality, even if it has an unpleasant end, does not change, while what is formed with words easily recedes and moves away from the sad towards the pleasant. Indeed, neither metre nor figure nor majesty of style nor the appropriateness of metaphor nor harmony and composition possess as much appeal and charm as a well-constructed mythical narrative. But just as in paintings, colour is more exciting than drawing because of the similarity of the figures and their deception, so in poetry, fiction combined with verisimilitude amazes and attracts more than a work composed with metre and style but without myth and fiction. Hence Socrates, devoting himself to poetic art because of certain dreams, he, who had been a fighter for truth all his life, was not a plausible creator nor well gifted for fiction, and he mixed Aesop's fables in verse, on the idea that there is no poetry without fiction [*Phaedo*, 60 e ff.]. Indeed, we know of sacrifices without dancing and without music, but we know of no poetry without myth and fiction.

B

Thus, the poems of Empedocles and Parmenides, Nicander's *Theriacá*, and Theognis' *Gnomologies* are discourses that have taken solemnity and metre from poetry as a vehicle to escape plain and vulgar style. [5] Likewise, when an eloquent and renowned man says something absurd and unpleasant in his poetry about

C

D

of the gods or demigods or virtue, whoever accepts their word as true, allowing themselves to be carried away, is lost and destroys their own opinion; on the other hand, whoever always remembers and clearly keeps in mind the enchantment of poetic art with fiction and can say on each occasion: '*Oh deception, more cunning than the lynx*' [fr. adesp. 349]. "Why, while you joke, do you frown, and why, while you deceive, do you pretend to teach?" He will suffer nothing terrible nor believe in anything evil [...]

17F B [1] And we will take even greater care of the young person if, at the same time as introducing them to poetry, we add that poetic art is a mimetic art and a faculty analogous to painting. [2] We should also teach them not only what everyone repeats, that poetry is spoken painting and painting is silent poetry, 18A but also that when we see a lizard, a monkey or the face of Thersites painted [*Iliad*, II, 213], we feel pleasure and admire not so much their beauty as their resemblance. For, by its very nature, the ugly cannot be beautiful. But imitation, if it achieves resemblance either to something ugly or to something beautiful, is praised. And, on the contrary, if it creates a beautiful image of an ugly body, it does not offer what is appropriate and plausible. Some also paint abnormal actions, such as Timomachus painting Medea killing her children, and Theon painting Orestes killing his mother, and Parrasius painting Odysseus' feigned madness, and Queraphanes painting the licentious union of women with men, with which, above all, young people must be accustomed to knowing that we do not praise the action from which B the imitation has arisen, but rather the art, if it has suitably reproduced the object. [3] And since poetry also often reveals ugly actions and evil passions and characters through imitation, it is fitting that young people should not accept what is admirable in these and well crafted as true, nor think it beautiful, but rather praise only how it adapts and corresponds to the figure represented.

Thus, just as we are disturbed and annoyed by the grunting of pigs, the squeaking of pulleys, the whistling of the wind, and the roar of the sea, we rejoice when someone skilfully imitates these things, such as Parmenon imitating pigs and Theodore imitating pulleys. We also flee from a sick man covered in sores, as if from an unpleasant spectacle, but we rejoice when we see Aristofonte's [painter] Philoctetes and Silanión's [sculptor] Jocasta, because they are conveniently representing people who are wasting away and dying, and in the same way, the young man who reads about the things that Thersites, the jester, or Sisyphus, the corrupter, or Batrachus, the libertine, do C with words or actions, must learn to praise the art and the ability to imitate these things, but to reject and reproach the situations and actions they imitate.

Indeed, it is not the same to imitate something beautiful as it is to imitate something beautiful, for 'beautifully' means 'in a suitable and appropriate manner', and appropriate and suitable are ugly things.

D

## PSEUDO LONGINO

### Texts from *On the Sublime*

See chapter IV, 8

*The treatise On the Sublime (De sublimitate), written by an unknown author in the 1st century AD, was mistakenly attributed to Cassius Longinus (213-273 AD), who was an orator and philosopher in Athens and Palmyra.*

De sublimitate, chaps. I, II, VII, VIII, IX, XXXV, XXXVI [translation by José García López in: Demetrio, Sobre el estilo, y Longino, Sobre lo sublime, Madrid, Gredos, 1979, pp. 147-150, 157-166, 202-205].

Theme: *the sublimity of a work of art requires the sublimity of the human being.*

Structure: [1] *Introduction; this paper must show not only what the sublime is, but also how to appropriate it.* [2] *The sublime thrills and enchants, and surpasses all artistic means applied in a purely rational manner.* [3] *The sublime is not only a talent, but by its very nature requires certain guidelines and rules.* [4] *The sublime differs from the pompous in that it elevates the souls of people of any era.* [5] *The five sources of the sublime in the field of language.* [6] *Not all passion is sublime, not everything sublime is passionate, but passion is an essential part of the sublime.* [7] *The grand (the strength to undertake significant projects) requires a great and noble spirit.*

[8] *Interpretative examples taken from poetry.* [9] *Human beings are moved by that which is most divine and beyond comprehension.* [10] *We must seek a synthesis between the flawless but small work of art and the excessive but unfortunately flawed natural sublime.*

[1] Cecilio's short treatise, which he wrote on the sublime, 1

When we examined it together, dearest Postumius Terentius, we found, as you know, that it was too poor in relation to the general subject and dealt very little with the main points, making it of little use to its readers, which should be the writer's primary goal. Every technical treatise requires at least two things: first, that it show what its object of study is, and second, in order of importance but most important in terms of value, that it teach how and by what methods we might make it our own. Well then,

Cecilio strives to show us, using countless examples, what the sublime is, as if he were addressing people who are unfamiliar with it; however, I do not know how he overlooks, as if it were unnecessary, another important point, namely, how we might bring our own nature to a certain progress of meaning through greatness. Nevertheless, perhaps it would be fair not to censure this man so much for his omissions as to praise him for his successes and his work. [2] But, as you have asked us as a personal favour to put something about the sublime on paper, without omitting anything, let us see if there is anything in our research that may be of some use to men in their public life. You yourself, my friend, will help us to judge with a great love of truth and as befits your character and as is your duty, all the details of my work. For truly, he was right who, when asked what we have in common with the gods, said: 'acting righteously and speaking truthfully'. Now, in writing to you, my dearest, with your knowledge of all the liberal arts, I almost feel dispensed from explaining in detail that the sublime is like an elevation and excellence in language, and that the great poets and prose writers achieved the highest honours and clothed their fame with immortality in this form and no other. For sublime language leads those who hear it not to persuasion, but to ecstasy. For everywhere the marvellous, which is accompanied by wonder, is always superior to persuasion and to what is merely pleasant. But if the act of persuading depends mostly on us, the qualities of the sublime, however, which give discourse an invincible power and force, completely dominate the listener. Experience in invention, skill in the order and arrangement of material are not evident in one or two passages, but we see them emerge with effort from the total fabric of the discourse. The sublime, used at the right moment, pulverises everything like lightning and reveals the speaker's powers in their entirety in the blink of an eye. These, then, I believe, and other similar considerations you could suggest, dearest Terenciano, from your own experience.

- II [3] However, we should first ask ourselves whether there is such a thing as the art of the sublime or its opposite, since there are those who believe, and in this they are completely mistaken, that such things can be subjected to technical rules. Greatness, it is said, is innate and cannot be acquired through teaching, and the only art of achieving it is to be that way by nature. All works of nature are spoiled, they think, and are much more despicable if they are reduced to skeletons by technical teachings. I maintain, however, that it can be proven that this is not the case, if one considers that nature, although it often obeys its own laws in emotions and sublimities, is nevertheless not something fortuitous and does not like to act without method at all; it

It is, in truth, the original and archetypal principle underlying all creation, but method is the only thing capable of setting limits and providing the special mode, the opportune moment at each specific point, and even the safest practice and use. In a sense, great geniuses are especially dangerous, self-reliant, undisciplined, unsupported and unburdened, abandoned to their own impulses and ignorant recklessness. They often need spurs as well as brakes. What Demosthenes says about the common destiny of men could also be applied to literature: that the greatest of all goods is good fortune, but second, and no less important, is making wise decisions, for those who lack this will also be totally destroyed by the former; nature takes the place of good fortune here, and art that of wise decisions. But the most important thing is that even the particularities of style in literature, which depend entirely on nature, cannot be learned by any other means than art. If, as we have said, those who censure those who seek a good education took all these things into account, they would not, it seems to me, consider the investigation of the things that now concern us to be superficial and useless.

[...]

[4] You must know, my dearest, that as in our ordinary life, nothing is great if despising it brings greatness; just as riches, honours, distinctions, tyrannies and all other goods, to which a great external theatrical apparatus is attached, could not appear, at least in the eyes of a sensible man, to be supremely good, since despising them is not a mediocre good – those who can possess such things but, out of greatness of spirit, disdain them, are truly the object of greater admiration than those who possess them; for this very reason, great attention must be paid to passages of elevated style in poetry and prose, lest they be only apparently grand, with added ornamentation, but upon closer examination prove to be empty, more noble to despise than to admire. Our soul is naturally transported in a certain way by the action of the truly sublime, and, seized by a certain exultant pride, it is filled with joy and pride, as if it were the author of what it has heard. When a sensible man versed in literature hears something repeatedly and his soul is not transported to lofty thoughts, nor, upon reflection, does anything remain in his spirit but mere words, which, if examined carefully, become insignificant, then it can be said with certainty that it is not truly sublime, since it was only preserved while it was being heard. For, in reality, only that which provides material for new reflections and makes opposition difficult, even impossible, and whose memory is lasting and

VII

indelible. In a word, he considers beautiful and truly sublime that which always pleases everyone. For when people of different customs, lives, hobbies, ages, and ways of thinking have a unanimous opinion about the same thing, then this judgement and coincidence of such diverse minds are a sure and unquestionable guarantee in favour of what they admire.

VIII [5] There are, therefore, five sources, as one might call them, that are most productive of greatness of style. The common basis for these five forms is the power of expression, without which they are absolutely nothing. The first and most important is the talent for conceiving great thoughts, as we have defined it in our work on *Jeno-fonte*. The second is vehement and enthusiastic passion. But these two elements of the sublime are, in most cases, innate dispositions; the rest, on the contrary, are products of an art: a certain kind of figure formation (these are of two kinds, figures of thought and figures of diction), and, along with these, noble expression, to which word choice and metaphorical and artistic diction belong. The fifth cause of greatness of style, which encompasses all the previous ones, is dignified and elevated composition. [6] But let us examine the content of each of these forms, anticipating only that of the five there are some that Cecilio has overlooked, such as passion. If he did so because he thought that the sublime and the pathetic are one and the same thing, that they always exist and grow together, he is mistaken; for there are passions that have nothing to do with the sublime and are insignificant, such as lamentations, sadness and fears; and, in turn, there is often sublimity without passion. Take, among thousands of other examples, the poet's bold words about the *Aloadae* [*Odyssey*, XI, 315-317]: "They tried to place the *Osa* on *Olympus* and the leafy *Pelion* on the *Osa* to make heaven accessible," and what follows these verses is even more grandiose: "and they, in truth, would have accomplished their purpose."

Similarly, in orators, eulogies, festive speeches and speeches given for show always contain majesty and elevation, but they commonly lack passion, which is why passionate orators are rarely good at eulogies and experts in eulogies, in turn, are not usually passionate. And if Cecilius, moreover, did not think that passion could in any way contribute to the sublime and therefore did not believe it was worthy of mention, he was again seriously mistaken. I would dare to assert, without any fear, that there is nothing so sublime as a noble passion, at the right moment, which breathes enthusiasm as a result of a special madness and inspiration and which turns words into something divine.

IX [7] However, since the first of the five sources occupies a more important place than the others, I am referring to natural greatness of spirit. Therefore, even though this is something that is received more

Once acquired, we must, as far as possible, elevate our souls towards all that is great, and fill them, so to speak, constantly with noble impulses: "How?" you may ask. On this subject, I have written elsewhere: 'The sublime is the echo of a noble spirit'. That is why, sometimes, even a bare, voiceless thought, on its own, because of the greatness of its content, causes admiration; thus, Ajax's silence in the *Nekyia* [*Odyssey*, XI, 563] is greater and more sublime than any words. Hence, it is absolutely necessary to establish, first of all, that the sublime comes from this: the true orator must not have a mean and ignoble spirit. For it is not possible for those who have had low habits and thoughts throughout their lives, typical of slaves, to accomplish anything worthy of admiration and the esteem of posterity. The words of those who have deep feelings are, naturally, grand. For this reason, sublime language is also found in men endowed with lofty thoughts. [8] Such is the reply to Parmenion, who had said: "I would have been content [six pages are missing in the original text] the distance from earth to heaven, and one might say that this is the measure not so much of Discord as of Homer. Different from this is Hesiod's passage on *Achlys* (sadness or shadow of Death), if the *Shield* is to be attributed to Hesiod: 'snot flowed from their noses' [*Shield of Heracles*, 267], for he did not achieve a horrific image, but a repulsive one. But how does Homer magnify divine things?

*How far can a man see through the misty distance, sitting on a watchtower and gazing out towards the wine-coloured sea? The horses of the gods leap just as far, neighing loudly* [*Iliad*, V, 770-772].

He measures his leap with a cosmic distance. So who would not rightly exclaim at such hyperbolic grandeur that, if the horses of the gods took two leaps like that in succession, they would find no place in the universe? The images in the battle of the gods are also excessive:

*All around, like a war trumpet, the immense sky and Olympus resounded. And in the depths, Aidoneus, lord of the shadows, was frightened, and filled with fear, he leapt from his throne and cried out, lest Poseidon, who shakes the ground, open the earth and reveal to mortals and immortals the horrendous and gloomy dwellings that even the gods abhor* [*Iliad*, XXI, 388; V 750; XX, 61-66].

Do you see, my friend, how, when the earth is torn apart from its bowels, and Tartarus itself appears naked, and the whole universe is destroyed and broken, all things at once, heaven and hell, mortal and immortal things, fight together and face together the dangers of that battle? All these things truly form a terrible image, and if it is not

interpreted as an allegory, utterly impious and lacking in fair measure. For when Homer presents us with the wounds of the gods, their discord, their vengeance, their tears, their captivity and their passions of all kinds, it seems to me that he does everything in his power to turn the men of the Trojan War into gods and the gods, in turn, into men. However, for us, when we are unhappy, death is the only refuge from our ills, but the gods, as he portrayed them, are immortal not by nature, but by misfortune. But much better than the *battle of the gods* are the passages that present divinity to us as something truly immaculate, powerful and pure. For example, those verses about Poseidon (which have already been studied by many of our predecessors):

*The high mountains and forests trembled, and the peaks and the city of the Trojans and the ships of the Achaeans beneath the immortal feet of Poseidon as he advanced. He guided his chariot over the waves, and monsters from the depths leapt joyfully around him; they recognised their lord. The sea opened joyfully, and they flew [Iliad, XIII, 18-19; XX, 60; XIII, 19, 27-29].*

A similar effect was achieved by the Jewish lawgiver, who was no ordinary man, for he understood and knew how to express properly the power of divinity when, at the beginning of his laws, he wrote: 'God said', he says what? 'Let there be light'. 'And there was light'; 'Let there be earth'. 'And the earth was made' [*Genesis*, I, 3]. I hope you will not mind if I quote another passage from the poet, also on human matters, so that you may understand how he usually treats the greatness of heroes. A sudden darkness and an impenetrable night surround the battle of the Greeks before him. Then Ajax, in his helplessness, says:

*Father Zeus, free the sons of the Achaeans from the thick fog, calm the sky and allow us to see with our eyes; then, in the light of the sun, let us perish [Iliad, XVII, 645-647].*

The emotion here is truly Ayante's own, for he does not ask to live (such a prayer would be too low for a hero), but rather, as in darkness, which is not conducive to action, he cannot use his courage for any noble deed, and, indignant at his inertia in battle, he prays that day may come as quickly as possible, certain that he will find, whatever happens, a funeral worthy of his courage, even when his adversary is Zeus. Here Homer blows impetuously with the combat and he himself feels what he is describing:

*He rages like Ares when he wields his spear, or like the devouring fire on the mountains, in the thicket of the deep forest, and foam flows from his mouth [Iliad, XV, 605-607].*

However, through the *Odyssey* (since, for many reasons, the passages of this poem must also be examined), he demonstrates that it is characteristic of a great genius, when already in decline, to feel attracted to myths in his old age. It is clear, for many reasons, that this work was composed secondarily, but above all because it introduces throughout the *Odyssey*, as episodes of the Trojan War, memories of the sufferings before Ilion, and, by Zeus, because it puts lamentations and words of pity into the mouths of its heroes, as if they were people known since ancient times. In reality, the *Odyssey* is nothing more than the epilogue to the *Iliad*:

*There lies the warlike Ajax, and there Achilles, and there Patroclus, as counsellor, comparable to the gods, and there my dear son [Odyssey, III, 109-111].*

For this very reason, I believe that the *Iliad*, written at the height of his inspiration, was composed entirely of action and struggle, while the *Odyssey* is mostly narrative, which is a sign of old age. Thus, in the *Odyssey*, Homer could be compared to the setting sun, whose grandeur remains, but not its intensity. For here Homer no longer retains the same vigour as in those famous verses about Ilion, nor a constant level of sublimity that never admits of any decline; nor is there such an abundance of passions crowding upon one another, nor sudden changes, realism and an abundance of images taken from real life. Rather, it is like the ocean when it retreats into itself and flows calmly around its own limits; only the ebb and flow of Homer's greatness and his wandering here and there in fabulous and incredible tales appear before our eyes. In saying this, I am not forgetting the storms of the *Odyssey*, nor the story of the Cyclops and some other episodes, but I am talking about old age, but the old age of Homer. Nevertheless, in all these passages, without distinction, the mythical dominates over real action. I have digressed, as I said, to show how great geniuses, when they are in decline, tend easily towards the trivial and insignificant, such as, for example, the story of the wineskin, that of Odysseus' companions turned into pigs, whom Zoilus called whining piglets, and that of Zeus fed like a chick by the doves, and the shipwreck, in which Odysseus goes ten days without eating anything, and those incredible passages about the death of the suitors. What else could this be called but 'visions of Zeus'? A second reason why we make these observations about the *Odyssey* is this: so that you may know how the decline of passion in great writers and poets leads to the painting of characters. Indeed, the description of family life in Odysseus's house is in some ways that of a comedy of manners.

[...]

[9] But, with regard to Plato, there is, as I said, another difference. Li- xxxv sias, who is inferior to him, not only in the greatness of his virtues, but

also by the number of them, nevertheless exceeds him even more by his errors than he is inferior to him in his virtues.

What, then, did those divine spirits see that, in seeking the most sublime in the art of writing, they disregarded accuracy in detail? They saw, among many other things, that nature did not choose man for a lowly and ignoble life, but rather introduced us into life and the entire universe as if it were a great festival, so that we might be spectators of all its trials and ardent competitors, instilling in our souls from the beginning an invincible love for all that is great and, in relation to us, supernatural. For this reason, the entire universe is not enough for the impetus of human contemplation and thought, but very often our thoughts abandon the boundaries of the world around us, and if one could look around at life and see how much it participates in everything extraordinary, great and beautiful, one would immediately know why we were born. Hence, driven by a natural instinct, we do not admire, by Zeus, the small streams, even if they are transparent and useful, but rather the Nile, the Danube, the Rhine and, even more so, the Ocean; nor does this small flame lit here by us surprise us more, because it preserves its pure light, than the celestial bodies, even though they often darken. Nor do we think there is anything more worthy of admiration than the craters of Etna, whose eruptions throw stones and entire hills from its abyss, and sometimes pour forth rivers of that titanic and spontaneous fire. From all this we could comment that what is useful or even necessary is within man's reach, but it is the extraordinary that always wins his admiration.

xxxvi [10] Therefore, when we speak of the great geniuses of literature, in whom greatness is not incompatible with profit and utility, we must deduce from this that such geniuses, although far from flawless perfection, nevertheless surpass the human level. All other qualities prove to those who possess them that they are human. The sublime, on the contrary, elevates them close to the spiritual greatness of the divine. The immaculate is irreproachable, but greatness also earns our admiration.

What else should we add to this? That each of these famous men often makes us forget all their faults with a single trait of sublimity and perfection and, more importantly, that if one were to gather all the errors of Homer, Demosthenes, Plato, and all the great geniuses, and put them together in one place, would one not find that they are a trifle, even more, that they represent only a tiny fraction when compared to the total beauty achieved by these heroes? For this reason, all posterity and all generations, whom envy cannot brand as insane, decreed and awarded them the prizes of victory, which they still hold today without

no one can take them away and which they would apparently take care of: "while the water flows and the tall trees blossom" [epigram on the tomb of Midas, cf. *Phaedrus*, 264 d]. However, to those who wrote that the imperfect Colossus is not superior to Polykleitos' Doryphoros, one could say, among many other things, this: in art we admire rigorous perfection, but in the works of Nature we admire greatness; and it is Nature that has given man the gift of speech. In sculpture, therefore, we seek resemblance to man, but in literature, as I have said, we seek that which surpasses the human. However (and our suggestion brings us back to the beginning of our treatise), since the absence of faults is most often a quality of art, and the heights of the sublime, even if they cannot always maintain the same tone, are the creation of an exalted nature, it is desirable that art should always lend its assistance to nature. For the collaboration between these two things could result in the perfect work.

On the issues raised, it was necessary to submit all this to judgement; let each person take pleasure in those aspects that they like best.

## LUCIAN

### Texts from *De domo* and *Zeuxis or Antiochus*

See chapter II, 2

*Lucian of Samosata was born in 120 AD. During his youth, he was an orator and travelling teacher of rhetoric (Atticist). He later turned to popular philosophy (dialogues, Menippean satires, diatribes). He died after 180 AD.*

1. *De domo*, § 6-9 [Spanish translation by Andrés Espinosa Alarcón in: *Lucian, Works, vol. I, Madrid, Gredos, 1981, pp. 150-152*].

Theme: *beauty is functional and useful.*

Structure: [1] *The beauty of this house can be demonstrated with arguments. [2] These arguments are: its position in relation to the sun, the symmetry of its dimensions, and the usefulness of its windows. [3] The ornamentation of the roof is not excessive, it is not overly luxurious, which is why it is beautiful. [4] Comparison of the decent woman with the courtesan: the restrained use of ornamentation is beautiful. [5] Excessive ornamentation is not beautiful, but terrible. [6] Ornamentation should be used to produce a specific effect. [7] The overall impression: a meadow blooming in eternal spring.*

6 [1] On the other hand, the beauty of this house is not in keeping with barbarous eyes, nor with Persian boasting or despotic pride; nor does it require only a poor spectator, but one who is cultured and who does not judge by sight alone, but accompanies his observations with a certain reflection.

[2] It is oriented towards the most beautiful part of the day – for the most beautiful and attractive is undoubtedly the sunrise –; it welcomes the sun as soon as it rises, and is flooded with light pouring through its wide-open doors, in the same orientation in which the ancients used to build their temples; the relationship between length and width and both in relation to height is harmonious, and the windows are large and well positioned for each season of the year. Isn't all this charming and worthy of praise?

7 [3] One can also admire, with regard to the roof, the sobriety of its beautiful lines, the impeccable decoration and the appropriate symmetry of the gold, which is not used unnecessarily, [4] but only

to the extent that it would suffice for a decent and beautiful woman to enhance her beauty – a fine chain around her neck, a light ring on her finger, earrings in her ears, a clip or headband to gather her hair freely, adding to her beauty what purple adds to a dress. Courtesans, on the other hand, especially the less graceful ones, wear dresses entirely of purple, and their necks are all gold, trying to achieve seduction through magnificence and attempting to mitigate their lack of beauty with the addition of external attractions; they believe that their arms will appear more brilliant if they shine in gold, that they will hide the disproportionate size of their feet in gold sandals, and that their faces will become more seductive if they appear with something very shiny. They are like this, but a decent woman uses gold only to the extent that is sufficient and necessary, and she would certainly not be ashamed of her beauty, even if she appeared without adornments.

[5] The roof of this house – one might say its head – is beautiful in itself 8 in itself, and is enhanced by gold like the sky resplendent at night with scattered stars and scattered flowers of fire. If

If everything were fire, we would not find it beautiful, but terrifying. [6] It can be observed that the gold there is not without purpose, and has not been scattered throughout the rest of the decoration for its own charm alone: it gives off a pleasant glow and tinges the whole house with red, for when the light, as it is projected, joins and combines with the gold, they shine at the same time and make the red hue shine twice as brightly.

[7] Such is the pinnacle and summit of the house, asking that a Homer 9 praise, calling it "high-ceilinged," like Helen's bridal chamber [*Iliad*, III, 324; *Odyssey*, IV, 121]; or "splendid," like Olympus [*Iliad*, I, 253; XIII, 243; *Odyssey*, XX, 103]. As for the other decorations, the murals, the beauty of the colours, the presence, accuracy and truth of every detail, they could well be compared to the face of spring or a flowery meadow, with the difference that these wither, dry up, fade and lose their beauty, while this is eternal spring, an unfading meadow and an immortal flower, for only the eyes touch it and drink in the sweetness of the images.

2. Zeuxis or Antiochus, § 4-8 [Spanish translation by Juan Zaragoza Botella in: *Lucian, Works, vol. III, Madrid, Gredos, 1990, pp. 447-449*].

*Lucian has been praised by his listeners for the originality of his discourse. To show that it is not the originality of the content that is fundamental, he recounts how the famous painter Zeuxis of Heraclea (late 5th century BC) reacted to similar praise. Lucian begins by describing a painting by Zeuxis.*

Theme: *Art is not just a strange occurrence of the imagination.*

Structure: [1] *Description of a painting by Zeuxis.* [2] *What is admirable about this painting is the perfect representation of different natures.*

[3] *What is essentially artistic is the execution, the representation, not the surprise of a new theme.*

4 [1] The centaur herself is depicted on green grass, sitting on the ground on her mare's hindquarters with her legs stretched out behind her. Her female part stands gently supported by her elbow, and her front legs are not extended, as if she were lying on her side, but one is bent, with the hoof retracted, as if she were kneeling, and the other, on the contrary, is raised and supported on the ground, like horses trying to jump. Of the two newborns, the centaur herself holds one in her arms and breastfeeds it in the human manner, while the other suckles from the mare as if it were a foal. At the top of the painting, as if from a watchtower, a centaur, undoubtedly the husband of the woman who is breastfeeding both babies, looks on smiling; but we cannot see him in full, only his central horse part; he holds a lion cub in his right hand and raises it above his head as if he wanted to scare the children as a joke.

5 [2] The other aspects of the painting, which are not entirely discernible to those of us who are merely amateurs, nevertheless encapsulate the full power of his art, such as the very precise extension of his lines, the perfect blending of colours, the appropriate reflection, the necessary shading, the proportion in size, the balance and the correspondence of the details with the whole. Let the children of painters praise such qualities, since it is their job to know them. For my part, I particularly applaud Zeuxis for the fact that he showed the extraordinary capacity of his art in a single subject in such a diverse way: he depicted the husband as absolutely terrible and very ferocious, with arrogant hair and mostly hairy, not only where he is a horse, but also on his human chest and especially on his shoulders, and he painted his gaze, although smiling, as completely savage, wild and violent.

6 This is how he painted the husband, while he depicted the female part of the horse as beautiful, like the Thessalian women, who are still untamed and virginal. The upper female half is beautiful, except for the ears, which are the only satyr-like feature. The fusion and conjunction of the bodies, where the equine part adapts and joins with the female part, is carried out gradually and as a whole, and as the change occurs without abrupt transitions, it is not noticeable when looking from one to the other. As for the children, despite their infancy, there is fierceness and their tenderness is already

terrible, which filled me with admiration, and seeing how they gaze innocently at the lion cub while both are clinging to their mother's teat and pressed against her body.

[3] Zeuxis thought that by exhibiting this painting he would amaze the spectators with his art.

7. They would immediately acclaim him; what else could they do when faced with such a beautiful spectacle? But everyone applauded especially the same aspects that I also admired.

They recently praised me for the originality of the subject and the novel idea of the painting, unprecedented among previous painters. So when Zeuxis realised that they were drawn to the novelty of the subject and distracted from his art to the point of placing the precision of detail second, he said to his disciple: "Come on, Micion, roll up the painting, pack it up and take it home, because these people praise the clay of our art and, on the other hand, do not care much whether the effects of light are well and artfully arranged, but rather the novelty of the subject prevails over the precision of the details."

This is what Zeuxis said, perhaps with excessive anger.

## PHILOSTATUS

### Texts from *the Life of Apollonius of Tyana and Images*

See chapter IV, 5

*Philostratus was born around 160 or 170 AD. During the reign of Septimius Severus, he went to Rome and entered the court of his wife, Julia Domna. After her death in 217, along with that of her son Caracalla, he left for Athens as a sophist, where he died between 244 and 249.*

1. Life of Apollonius of Tyana: II, 22; VI, 19; V, 21; V, 14; IV, 7; II, 20 [Spanish translation by Alberto Bernabé Pajares in: *Philostratus, Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Madrid, Gredos, 1979, pp. 146-149, 365-367, 301-302, 293-295, 229, 144].

*This work, written for the circle of Julia Domna, combines motifs from the travel novel with a glorification of the Neopythagorean Apollonius of Tyana, who lived in the 1st century AD.*

Themes and structure:

A. Art is imitation with spirit (fantasy, imagination) and through mastery of a technique. [1] Painting is imitation in colours. [2] The interpretation of clouds is based on our natural ability to create images (imagination). [3] Painting is imitation with spirit and hand, that is, with a technique that must be learned. [4] Painting can also imitate in black and white, that is, without colours. [5] To understand art, viewers must possess the same ability as the artist: the ability to imitate with imagination.

B. Fantasy is superior to art. (Apollonius argues with the Egyptian Thespesius about the images of the Egyptian gods, which largely represent animal figures). [1] The appropriate beauty of the images of the Greek gods is represented through fantasy. [2] Fantasy sees with the inner eye and in a much more complete way than imitation. [3] The image of fantasy in the spirit is much more impressive than a poor external model that must be imitated.

C. Musical art acts upon the soul. [1] The sound of the flute lifts the listener's soul. [2] Music fills and calms the listener with its harmonies. [3] The musician must learn a specific technique.

D. Art must represent truth and fulfil an ethical task. [1] The danger of mythical poetry: it tells inappropriate stories.

[2] *Aesop is more truthful than poets, as he does not try to hide unreality. Furthermore, he improves us with his morals.*

*E. Philosophy and wisdom are above art. [1] A city is better adorned with superior men than with buildings and paintings.*

[2] *Superior men are found everywhere; they are not tied to one place.*

*F. Example of the representation of a fantastic work.*

A [1] During the time he spent in the temple, which was long until the king II 22 was told that some foreigners had arrived, Apollonius said:

"Damis, is the painting of any value?"

"Yes," he replied, "if it is also true."

"And what does that art consist of?"

"In mixing all the colours that exist: blues with greens, whites with blacks, and reds with yellows.

"And why do you mix them? It's not just to give colour, like cosmetics.

"For imitation," he replied, "and for representing a dog, a horse, a man, a ship, and everything else that the sun beholds. It even represents the sun itself, sometimes with its four horses, as it is said to appear there, and other times even leaving a trail of fire in the sky, when it paints the ether and the residence of the gods.

"Is painting, then, an imitation, Damis?"

"What else?" he said. "For if I did not do that, I would seem to be foolishly obtaining ridiculous colours.

[2] "And what about the things you see in the sky," added Apollonius, "when the clouds break apart: centaurs and goat-deer, as well as, by Zeus, wolves and horses? What do you say? Aren't they a figment of the imagination?"

"It seems so," he replied.

"So, Damis," he said, "is divinity a painter, and, abandoning the winged chariot in which it travels, bringing order to the divine and the human, does it then sit down, for entertainment and to draw these things, like children in the sand?"

Damis blushed when he realised how absurd his argument was. However, Apollonius, so as not to humiliate him, since it was not hurtful to his refutations, said to him:

—But that is not what you meant, Damis, but rather that these, as far as divinity is concerned, wander through the sky formless and as chance has arranged them, but that we, endowed by nature with the capacity for imitation, subject them to order and shape them.

—Let us think that instead, Apollonius, for it is more plausible and much better.

[3] —So, Damis, the art of imitation is twofold, and we must consider that there is one that imitates with the hand and the mind (this is painting) and another that only represents with the mind.

"Not double," said Damis, "but it is appropriate to think that one is the most perfect, painting, which can carry out representations with the mind and with the hand, and that the other is a part of it, since anyone, even without pictorial ability, perceives and imitates with the mind, but could not use the hand to paint.

"Could it be, Damis," he replied, "because my hand is crippled by an injury or illness?"

"No, by Zeus," he replied, "rather because I have never touched a brush or a tool, or a colour; because I lack, therefore, the training to paint.

"So, Damis," he said, "we both agree that the capacity for imitation comes to men from nature, but the capacity for painting comes from skill. [4] The same would be evident in the plastic arts. And painting itself gives me the impression that you do not consider it only as that which is obtained through colours, since a single colour was sufficient for the most ancient painters, and as it evolved, four colours were used, and then more; but also drawing, even without colour, which effectively combines light and shadow, is rightly called painting, given that in these we also see resemblance, form, intelligence, power and audacity, even though they lack colour and do not represent the blood or the fullness of a head of hair or a beard, but rather, composed in a simplified form, represent a blond or grey-haired man. Even if we draw one of the Indians with a white line, it will undoubtedly be seen to be black, for the flatness of the nose, the spiky hair, the prominent jaw and that kind of terror in the eyes will give it the appearance of a black man to those who see it and will represent an Indian to those who see it in a way that is not lacking in intelligence. [5] Therefore, I would say that even those who view works of painting require the ability to imitate, for no one could praise a painted horse or bull without having in mind the animal being represented. Nor would anyone admire Timomachus' *Ajax*, who has been depicted by him in his madness, if they did not have in their mind an image of Ajax and also that it was plausible that, after killing the flocks of Troy, he sat down exhausted, conceiving the plan to kill himself as well. These works of art by Porus and Damis should not be considered solely as works of forging, as they resemble paintings, nor as works of painting, as they have been forged; let us therefore consider them to be an elaborate product of a painter and bronze artist, as described by Homer in relation to Achilles' shield [*Iliad*, XVIII, 483 ff.]. These too are full of 'killers and dying men', and you will say that 'the earth is covered with blood' [*Iliad*, IV, 451], even though it is bronze.

[...]

B [1] –Question –they insisted–, because somehow a question is followed by reasoning.

So Apollonius said to them:

"The first question I will ask you will be about the gods. By virtue of what teaching have you presented images of gods that are strange and ridiculous to the men here, except in a few cases? In a few? Rather, in very few, in which they have been erected in a wise and appropriate manner to a god, but the rest of your images seem to honour irrational and ignoble animals rather than gods.

Disgusted, Thespesius replied:

—And how would you say our statues are erected?

"Without doubt in the most beautiful and reverent way in which gods can be represented," he replied.

"You are referring, I suppose," he continued, "to the Zeus of Olympia and the image of Athena and the goddess of Cnidus, the Argive and all the others that are equally beautiful and full of charm.

"Not only those," he replied, "but I affirm that absolutely all the statuary among the others conforms to what is proper, but that you ridicule the divine, instead of believing in it.

"So, according to that," argued Thespesius, "after ascending to heaven and making moulds of the figures of the gods, Phidias and Praxiteles reproduced them through their art, or was there something else that led them to mould them?

"Something else," replied Apollonius, "something full of wisdom, moreover.

"And what is that?" he insisted. "Well, you couldn't say anything other than imitation."

[2] "They are the work of imagination," he explained, "a craftsmanship more skilful than imitation. For imitation will do its work from what it has seen, but imagination will do its work even from what it has not seen, for it will conceive it by reference to what exists. And while imitation is often shaken by astonishment, imagination is not, for it boldly turns to what it itself has conceived. It is certainly necessary that if one conceives the image of Zeus, one sees him with the sky, the seasons and the stars, as Phidias undertook his task in his day. And if one is going to depict Athena, it is necessary to conceive in one's mind the army, wisdom, the arts, and how she sprang from a leap of Zeus himself. But if you were to make a falcon, an owl, a wolf or a dog, and take it to the temples instead of Hermes, Athena and Apollo, the animals and birds would seem estimable, as such images, but the gods would be greatly diminished in their own dignity.

[3] "It seems to me that you are superficially criticising our religion," he replied, "for if there is one thing that the Egyptians are wise about, it is precisely not to be arrogant about the images of the gods, but to make them symbolic and with a hidden meaning, so that they appear more venerable.

Laughing, Apollonius continued:

"Well, man, great is the benefit that the wisdom of the Egyptians and Ethiopians has brought you, if your dog, your ibis and your goat are going to seem more venerable and more divine! For that is

what I am hearing the wise Tespession say. But, in fact, what is venerable or frightening about them? For it is more natural for perjurers, sacrilegious persons, and the band of altar robbers to despise such images than to fear them, and if they are more venerable, inasmuch as they have a hidden meaning, the gods in Egypt would be much more venerable if no statues had been erected to them, but you used theology in a wiser and more mysterious way. For surely it was possible to build temples and set up altars, as well as to establish what was necessary to sacrifice to them and what was not necessary to sacrifice to them, and when and to what extent, and with what words and deeds, and not to have introduced any images, but to have left the gods who frequent the temples to the imagination, for the mind delineates and configures something better than craftsmanship. But you have prevented the gods from being seen and imagined in a beautiful way.

[...]

C [1] At that time, the flute player Cano lived in Rhodes and was considered the best flute player. So, calling him, he said:

"What effect does the flute player have?"

"Whatever the listener wants," he replied.

V 21 "However," he added, "many listeners prefer to be rich rather than hear the flute. Do you make those who desire it rich?"

"Not at all," he replied, "even if I wanted to."

"And what? Do you make the young people in the audience handsome? Because all those who have something of youth in them want to look beautiful."

"Not even that," he replied, "even though it has the utmost charm on the flute."

"What, then," he added, "do you think the listener wants?"

"What else," replied Cano, "but that the afflicted may lull their sorrow with the flute, that the joyful may become happier than before, that the lover may become more passionate, and that the devotee of sacrifices may become more inspired by the gods and full of hymns?"

[2] "And that effect, Cano," he continued, "is it produced by the flute itself because it is made of gold, or orichalcum, or deer or donkey tibia like others, or is it something else that possesses that power?"

"Another thing, Apollonius," he replied. "For it is music, its modes, the ability to combine modulations and the ease of variations inherent in the art of playing the flute, as well as the characteristics of harmonies, that shape listeners and make their souls whatever they want."

[3] "I understand, Cano," said Apollonius, "what your art does. For its variety and its adaptation to all modes is what you practise and what you offer to those who come before you. But it seems to me that, in addition to the qualities you have mentioned, the flute requires others: ease

To breathe, skill with the mouth and for the flute player to have a steady hand. Breathing is easy if the breath is clear and clean and if the throat does not make a sound, as this makes the sound less musical. Skill with the mouth is achieved if the lips, adapted to the neck of the flute, play it without puffing out the cheeks. I consider it very important for the flute player to have a steady hand, and this occurs if the wrist does not tire from being bent and if the fingers are not slow to flit over the notes; for changing quickly from mode to mode is more readily done by those who have a steady hand. If you possess all these gifts, take heart and play the flute, Cano, for Euterpe is with you.

[...]

D [1] They say that Apollonius began by asking his comrades the following question:

"Is there such a thing as mythology?"

"Yes, by Zeus," said Menippus, "at least the one that poets praise.

"And what do you think of Aesop?"

"A mythologist and fabulist; that's all."

"And in which of the two kinds of myths is there wisdom?"

"In those of the poets," he replied, "for they are sung as if they were events that actually happened.

"And what about Aesop's?"

"Frogs, donkeys, and nonsense suitable for old women and children to devour," he replied.

"Even so," said Apollonius, "I find Aesop's fables more suitable for wisdom. For those that refer to heroes, on which all poetry is based, even corrupt those who listen to them, since poets recount unusual loves, marriages between siblings, slander against the gods, devouring of children, ignoble deceit and lawsuits, and their claim to reality leads the passionate, the envious and the eager, whether to become rich or to become tyrants, to emulate the stories. Aesop, on the other hand, because of his wisdom, did not count himself among those who narrate such things, but went his own way. Moreover, like those who eat well with the simplest of foods, he teaches great things from topics of little importance, and, after offering the story, he adds the 'do' or 'do not'. [2] On the other hand, he is more committed to truthfulness than poets. For they force their own stories to make them seem plausible. He, on the other hand, after announcing a story that is false (everyone knows it), is truthful by the very fact that he does not speak of true things. Furthermore, after telling his own story, the poet leaves it up to the reader to test whether it really happened. But the one who tells a fictional story and draws a moral from it, like Aesop, shows that he uses fiction for the benefit of the listener. It is also charming in him that he makes animals more pleasant and interesting to humans, since we are accustomed from childhood to...

V 14

Through these stories and raised by them, we form opinions about each of the animals: some would be like kings; others, simple; others, ingenious; others, honest. In contrast, the poet, after saying "there are many forms of the divine" [Euripides, *Alcestis*, 1159] or something to that effect, leaves after dismissing the chorus. Aesop, after adding an oracle to his story, leaves the audience with the conclusion he intended.

[...]

IV 7 E [1] Seeing that the Smyrnaeans were keenly interested in all kinds of intellectual pursuits, he encouraged them and increased their interest in them. He also urged them to think more about themselves than about the appearance of the city; for although it was the most beautiful of all cities under the sun, accessible to the sea and blessed with the sources of the zephyr, it was nevertheless more pleasing to be crowned with men of truth than with porticoes, paintings and more gold than was necessary; [2] Buildings remain in their place, unseen anywhere else except in the place on earth where they stand, but good men are seen everywhere and their voices are heard everywhere, so that the city in which they were born appears great in proportion to the number of them who can travel the earth. He said that cities as beautiful as that one resembled the statue of Zeus that Phidias completed in Olympia, for it remained seated (as the artist saw fit), but that men who go everywhere are in no way different from the Homeric Zeus that Homer has represented in many forms, making him more wonderful than the ivory one, for one is visible on earth, but the other is guessed at everywhere in the sky.

[...]

II 20 F. They say they saw a temple in front of the wall, a little less than a hundred feet high, made of stone covered with stucco, and that inside there was a sanctuary that was somewhat small in proportion to the temple, which was so large and surrounded by columns, but worthy of admiration. Bronze panels engraved with the exploits of Porus and Alexander were nailed to each wall. Elephants, horses, soldiers, helmets, and shields were forged in brass, silver, gold, and black bronze; spears, darts, and swords were all made of iron. Like the subject of a famous painting, as if it were something by Zeuxis, Polygnotus or Euphronus, who liked chiaroscuro, liveliness, depth and relief, so it was visible, they say, there too, and the materials had been arranged like colours.

The nature of the painting itself was also pleasing. Although Poro had dedicated them after the Macedonian's death, in them the Macedonian appears victorious, healing the wounded Poro and giving him India, which had already passed into his power.

2. Images, prologue, 'Como', 'The Birth of Hermes' [Spanish translation by Luis Alberto de Cuenca and Miguel Ángel Elvira in: *Philostratus the Elder, Images, Philostratus the Younger, Images, Callistratus, Descriptions, Madrid, Siruela, 1993, pp. 33-34, 34-37, 80-82*].

Themes and structure:

A. Reason and theoretical basis for interpreting the works of art in the Naples collection. [1] Painting must be learned, just like poetry: both spring from wisdom. [2] Mimesis. [3] Essence of sculpture or plastic art. [4] Essence of painting. [5] Reason for this text.

B. Como: the wedding procession. [1] The setting: at night before a wedding bed. [2] The representation of Como asleep. [3] Faceless, the representation is blind. The distribution of light and shadow. [4] The aim of the painting is not external closeness to nature, but internal harmony. [5] The movement and noise of the procession are depicted.

C. The birth of Hermes. [1] Brief outline of the myth depicted. [2] Birth: meaning of this process and internal and external movement. [3] Representation of participants' thoughts.

[4] Hilarity on Apollo's face after discovering the theft.

A [1] Those who do not love painting are unfair to the truth, unfair to all the wisdom that has been given to poets – for both poets and painters contribute equally to the knowledge of the deeds and appearance of heroes – and they despise the proportions by which art is linked to reason. [2] For those who wish to exercise their ingenuity, painting was invented by the gods based on natural forms, such as the meadows painted by the Seasons or celestial phenomena; but for those who investigate the origin of art, imitation is the oldest discovery and most akin to nature, and it was wise men who invented it, sometimes calling it painting and sometimes plastic art. 1,1,1

[3] There are many forms of plastic art: modelling itself, imitation in bronze, the work of those who work with white marble or Parian marble, ivory carving and, by Zeus, even glyptics. [4] Painting, on the other hand, is based on colours, and although it only uses these, it manages better with them than the plastic arts with their many means. Because it reproduces shading and allows us to recognise the gaze of the madman or of those who are sad or happy. A plastic artist is not capable of reproducing the sparkle in the eyes, while painting can represent blue, green or black eyes, and also knows how to depict blonde, red or golden hair, the colour of clothes and weapons, rooms, houses, forests, mountains, fountains and the atmosphere that surrounds everything. 2

The history of those who have excelled in this art, and that of the cities and kings who worshipped it, has already been told by others, in

special mention to Aristodemus of Caria, whom I visited four years ago to study painting. He painted using Eumelus' technique, but with much more charm. This book is not about painters or their biographies, but rather offers descriptions of paintings that serve as models for young people, so that they may learn to interpret them and apply themselves to a worthy task.

4 [5] Here is how I came up with the idea for this treatise: games were being held in Naples, a city in Italy founded by Greeks, whose inhabitants demonstrated their Hellenism in their passion for words. I did not want to deliver my speeches in public, but a crowd of young people came to pester me in front of my host's house. We lived outside the city walls, in a residential neighbourhood facing the sea; there was a portico facing the zephyr, four or five storeys high, I believe, overlooking the Tyrrhenian Sea. All the marble that luxury could provide was gathered there, lending splendour to the building, but its greatest glory was the paintings hanging on its walls, which seemed to me to have been collected with great discernment, as they revealed the mastery of many painters. I had already thought of describing the paintings when my host's very young son, who was ten years old at the time but was a very studious child full of curiosity to learn, after watching me closely as I  
5 ven from painting to painting, asked me to explain them to him. So as not to appear rude, I said, 'Very well. We will make them the subject of a talk as soon as the young people arrive'. When they arrived, I said, 'Let the boy stand in front. My words will be addressed to him. Follow me, and not only listen, but also ask questions if you do not understand something I am going to say'.

[...]

I,2,1 B [1] The god Como, to whom men owe their joyful processions, stands at the doors of a room, gilded, I believe, as it is not easy to distinguish the colour, since it is night. The night is not personified, but the theme presupposes it, and the portico reveals the wealth of the newlywed couple lying inside. [2] Como has arrived, young among young men, tender and still a child, flushed from wine and asleep on his feet under the effects of drunkenness. He sleeps, his face falling onto his chest, hiding his neck, and holding a spear in his left hand. This hand appears relaxed and loose, as is normal when, as we begin to fall asleep, sleep overtakes us and the mind drifts into oblivion; for the same reason, the torch held in his right hand seems to slip as sleep relaxes his hand.  
2 Fearing that the fire will come close to his body, he crosses his left leg over his right and directs the torch to his left, stretching his arm and bending his knee to avoid the heat of the fire.

[3] When depicting young characters, painters must give them faces, for without them the paintings appear blind; however, this one hardly needs a face, as he tilts his head

3

and receives its shadow. This means, I think, that boys of his age should not participate in this type of celebration with their heads uncovered. The rest of the body is perfectly represented, as the torch gives it light and illuminates it entirely.

[4] The chorus is worthy of praise

of roses is worthy of praise, but not only for its mere appearance (it is not a complicated task

–with yellow and blue tones, for example– imitate the shape of flowers), but also for the appreciation deserved by the softness and delicacy of the garland. The pearly dew-like appearance of the roses is also worthy of praise, and I would say that even their scent is painted.

[5] And what can be said about the merry procession? What, if not the participants themselves? Or do the rattles and flute tunes and confused chants not hurt your ears? The torches emit their uncertain light, enough for the revellers to see what is right in front of their noses, but not enough for us to see them. There is much laughter, and the women mingle with the men, snatching their sandals and dresses and putting them on, contrary to the usual norm. The festivities lend themselves to women dressing up as men and men 'adopting women's clothing' [Euripides, *Bacchae*, 836 and 852] and imitating women's gait. And the flower crowns have already lost their freshness, and their joy has disappeared as they are crushed on their heads in the disorderly race; for the freedom of flowers abhors the hand that withers them before their time. The painting also depicts, in a way, the hubbub that accompanies the festival: the fingers of the right hand strike the concave palm of the left, so that the hands clap together in unison, imitating the sound of cymbals.

[...]

C [1] The newborn, still in nappies, who drives cattle towards 1,26,1 a crack in the earth and steals Apollo's weapons, is Hermes. The god's thefts are very amusing. It is said that Hermes, when Maya

She gave birth, became fond of stealing, an activity in which she became highly skilled; and she never did so out of necessity, but for fun and games. If you want to follow her trail, look at the painting. She was born on the peaks of Olympus, at its very summit, the abode of the gods. Homer says [*Odyssey*, VI, 42 ff.] that there you cannot feel the rain or hear the wind, but because of its enormous height, Olympus is not even touched by snow, and it is an absolutely divine place, free from all the ravages suffered by mountains.

of men. [2] Here the Hours care for the newborn Hermes. The

The painter has depicted each of them according to the season they represent; they wrap the child in swaddling clothes and scatter the most beautiful flowers to adorn them. As they turn to Hermes' mother, who is resting on her bed after giving birth, the child slips out of his swaddling clothes, begins to walk and descends from Olympus. The mountain rejoices with him, showing a totally human smile. He notices that Olympus rejoices because Hermes was born there.

- 3 [3] What has been stolen? Oxen grazing on the slopes of Olympus, with golden horns and coats whiter than snow – they are sacred to Apollo – and which Hermes leads along a winding path to a crevice in the earth, not with the intention of killing them, but of keeping them hidden for a single day, until their loss angers Apollo; and the child, as if he had had no part in the matter, returns to his swaddling clothes. Apollo addresses Maya, demanding his oxen, but she pays no attention to him, believing that the god is
- 4 talking nonsense. Do you want to know what he's saying? Because, judging by the expression on his face, it seems that he's not just making sounds, but actually pronouncing real words. It's as if he were saying to Maya: 'Your son, the one you gave birth to yesterday, has wronged me, for he has hidden the cattle that I love so much in the ground, and I don't know where. I'm going to kill him and bury him deeper than he buried my oxen'. She peered over...
- 5 bra, without understanding a word he says. [4] They are still arguing among themselves when Hermes stands behind Apollo and, jumping nimbly onto his back, stealthily unfastens the god's bow; while he is stealing it, no one sees him, but afterwards he cannot avoid being discovered. At this point, the painter's subtlety is revealed, as he is able to blend anger and joy in Apollo's expression. But his joy is incipient, for it has not completely replaced his anger.

## PLOTINUS

### Texts from the *Enneads*

See chapter IV, 8

*Plotinus was born in 205 AD, though it is not known where. At the age of twenty-eight, he began studying philosophy, first for eleven years in Alexandria. At the age of forty, he moved to Rome, where ten years later he began writing philosophical essays for his circle of friends. Porphyry collected them and published them in the form of six "Enneads". Plotinus died in 269 or 270, shortly after leaving Rome.*

Enneads, I, 6, "On Beauty" [Spanish translation by Jesús Igal in: *Porphyry, Life of Plotinus, and Plotinus, Enneads I-II, Madrid, Gredos, 1992, pp. 275-293*].

Theme: *beauty*.

Structure: [1] *The universality of beauty. The question: what is beauty?*  
[2] *Beauty cannot reside solely in proportion, in the symmetry of parts, for if the whole is beautiful, so too must the parts be beautiful.* [3] *Nor can spiritual and emotional beauty be based on symmetry.* [4] *That which the soul, which is on the side of Essence, recognises as akin to itself is beautiful.*  
[5] *This affinity consists in participating in the divine force of formation, in the idea.* [6] *Beauty is known as the multiplicity in matter that corresponds to the inner unity of the idea.* [7] *The beauty of colour is the idea of light, which shines and glows as such. Its purest expression is fire.* [8] *The beauty of sounds consists of certain harmonic relationships which, as an idea, form and dominate sounds.* [9] *The perception of spiritual beauty also provokes, especially in souls moved by love, trembling and emotion, just as happens with sensory beauty.* [10] *The emotion and exaltation felt when contemplating a beautiful soul is based on the beauty of the colourless soul and the radiance of its virtues.* [11] *The soul is beautiful to the extent that it is.* [12] *The ugliness of the soul consists of external additions, in which the soul is directed towards the body and matter.* [13] *Therefore, the beautiful soul is the soul purified of the earthly, just as virtues cause freedom from the earthly, the impure, and pleasure.* [14] *The beautiful soul is pure form, pure spirit, similar to God, truly being and therefore beautiful.*

[15] *What truly exists is beautiful and good; what does not truly exist is ugly and evil.* [16] *Dominated by the spirit or the soul, bodies become beautiful.* [17] *The authentic self, which aspires to goodness, contemplates true beauty as its goal.* [18] *This beauty, the source of all earthly beauty, stirs the soul, inspires true love, and is the authentic goal.* [19] *The path to beauty takes us away from here and returns us to where we came from.* [20] *Beauty is seen with the inner eye, and only through beauty.* [21] *The realm of beauty is the beyond, ideas, the spiritual, the good, the primordial being.*

1 [1] Beauty is mainly found in the realm of sight. But it is also found in the realm of hearing and in combinations of words; it is also found in music, and even in all kinds of music, for there are also beautiful melodies and rhythms. And if, abandoning sensory perception, we continue upwards, we also have beautiful occupations, actions and habits, beautiful sciences and the beauty of virtues. Is there also some beauty prior to these? The discussion itself will show this.

What, then, is the cause of bodies appearing beautiful and of the ear agreeing that sounds are beautiful? And how many things depend directly on the soul, by virtue of which are they all beautiful? And are all beautiful things beautiful by virtue of one and the same beauty, or is the beauty in one body different from that in another? And what are these beauties? For there are things, such as bodies, that are beautiful not because of their very substance, but because of their participation in beauty, while others are beautiful in themselves, for example, the nature of virtue. Indeed, the same bodies sometimes appear beautiful and sometimes not, as if being a body is one thing and being beautiful is another. What, then, is the beauty present in bodies? This is the first point to be examined.

[2] What, then, is it that catches the eye of the spectators and draws them in, attracting them and making them enjoy the spectacle? Once we have ascertained this, it may well be that, 'using it as a ladder' [Plato, *Symposium*, 211 c 3], we can contemplate the remaining beauties. Well, everyone, or almost everyone, agrees that it is the proportion of the parts to each other and to the whole, together with the right colouring added to it, that constitutes visible beauty, and that for visible things, as for all others in general, being beautiful consists in being well proportioned and measured.

According to this theory, nothing that is simple, but only that which is necessarily composite, will be beautiful. Furthermore, according to this theory, the whole will be beautiful, while the individual parts will not be endowed with beauty in themselves, but will contribute to the beauty of the whole. And yet, if the whole is beautiful, the parts must also be beautiful, for it is true that beauty must not consist of ugly parts, but rather

must have taken possession of all of them. Furthermore, according to this theory, beautiful colours, like sunlight, being simple and not deriving their beauty from proportion, would be excluded from being beautiful. And gold, How can it be beautiful? And are lightning bolts or stars at night worthy of being seen because they are beautiful? The same applies to sounds: the simple sound will have disappeared, even though many times each sound in a beautiful ensemble is beautiful in itself. And in cases where, even though the same proportions are maintained, the same face sometimes appears beautiful and sometimes not, how can we not admit that beauty is something else above and beyond proportion, and that proportion is beautiful for some other reason?

[3] And if, moving on to beautiful occupations and reasoning, they attributed the cause of beauty to proportion even in these things, What proportion could be invoked in occupations, laws, teachings, or fine arts? How can there be proportion between theorems? If it is because they harmonise, there will also be concordance and harmony between bad theorems. Indeed, the thesis that 'justice is pure simplicity' harmonises and resonates with that which states that 'moderation is foolishness', and the two agree with each other. Well then, all virtues are beauties of the soul and more true beauties than the former; but how can they be proportionate? They are not proportionate either in terms of magnitude or in terms of number, even though there are several parts to the soul. For what would be the formula for the composition or combination of those parts or those theorems? And what would be the beauty of Intelligence, if Intelligence were alone?

[4] So, returning to the subject, let us first say that 2 consists, indeed, of the beauty that exists in bodies. Indeed, it is something that is perceptible even at first glance, and the soul pronounces itself as one who understands and, recognising it, welcomes it and adjusts to it. On the other hand, if it encounters ugliness, it 'withdraws' [Plato, *Symposium*, 206 d 6], and rejects and disagrees with it because it is not in tune with it and is alien to it. Well, our explanation is that, since the soul is by nature what it is and comes from the Essence that is superior to it among beings, as soon as it sees anything of its lineage or a trace of its lineage, it rejoices and is moved and relates it to itself and remembers itself and its own kind.

[5]—Well, how similar are the things here to the beautiful things there? Furthermore, if they are similar, let us concede that they are similar. But by what virtue are both those things there and those things here beautiful?

Our response is that those here are so because they participate in a form. Because everything that is formless, as it is susceptible by nature to conformation and form, if it does not participate in reason and form, is ugly and falls outside of divine Reason. And this is absolute ugliness. But that which has not been dominated by conformation and reason is also ugly, because matter resisted being conformed to the

Everything is determined by form. It is therefore form that, with its advent, composes and coordinates what is to be something composed of many parts, reduces it to a single community and, through harmony, transforms it into unity, given that, as form was one, that which was formed by it must also be one, as it could be, consisting of many parts. And once it has been reduced to unity, that is when beauty settles upon it, giving itself to both the parts and the whole. For when it takes possession of something one and homogeneous, it gives the whole the same beauty as the parts. For example, sometimes it will be art that gives beauty to an entire house along with its parts, while at other times a particular nature will give beauty to a single stone.

Behold, then, how the beautiful body originates through communion with a primordial reason of divine Beings.

3 [6] Now, the beautiful body is known by the faculty destined to preside over it. No one is more authoritative than it in judging its own objects, provided that the remaining soul ratifies its judgements and, perhaps, even pronounces on them, adjusting the object to the form attached to it and using that form for its judgement, as a rule for judging what is straight.

But how is it that what is inherent in a body is in accordance with the incorporeal? How is it that the architect judges that the exterior of the house is beautiful after having adjusted it to the interior form of the house?

The external form, if you disregard the stones, is the internal form divided by the external mass of matter, a form that is indivisible even though it appears in multiplicity. Thus, when perception observes that the form immanent in bodies has bound itself to and dominated the contrary nature, which is formless; when it sees a conformation triumphantly mounted above other conformations, it gathers and crowds together that scattered form, sends it back and puts it inside, now undivided, and delivers it, harmonious, adjusted and friendly, to the inner form. It is like when a virtuous man is pleased by the glimpse of virtue that emerges in a young man because it is in accordance with his own true inner virtue.

[7] The beauty of colour is simple due to its conformation and its predominance over the darkness of matter through the presence of light, which is incorporeal and is reason and form. Hence, fire itself surpasses other bodies in beauty, because it ranks above the other elements in terms of form: by position, it is above and is the most subtle of all bodies, bordering on the incorporeal; and it is the only one that does not receive the others within itself, while the others receive it, for they are heated, while it does not cool, and it is primarily coloured, while the others receive the form of colour from it. That is why it shines and glows as if it were a form. But if fire does not predominate, as it diminishes in light, it ceases to be beautiful, as if it did not participate at all in the form of colour.

[8] On the other hand, since hidden harmonies produce manifest ones, they enable the soul to achieve an understanding of beauty in this way, revealing the same thing in a different medium. Now, perceptible harmonies are characterised by numerical measurement, but not in just any proportion, rather in one that serves to produce a predominant form.

And suffice it to say about sensible beauties that, being nothing more than phantoms and evanescent shadows, they enter into matter, adorn it, and, appearing to us, move us.

[9] About the ulterior beauties, which she will no longer see... 4

It is not sensory perception, but rather the soul that sees and judges them without the mediation of the organs. We must contemplate them by elevating ourselves, leaving sensory perception behind. But just as, in the case of sensible beauties, it would not be possible for those who have neither seen nor perceived them as beautiful – for example, those blind from birth – to speak about them, so too it is not possible for those who have not embraced it to speak about the beauty of occupations, sciences and other such things, nor about the 'splendour' [Plato, *Phaedrus*, 250 b 3] of virtue to those who have not even imagined how beautiful the 'face of justice' [Euripides, *Melanippe*, fr. 486] and moderation are, so beautiful that 'neither the evening star nor the morning star' [Aristotle, *Phyt. Nic.*, 1129 b 28-29] are so beautiful. But it is necessary to contemplate such beauties with what the soul sees them with and, upon seeing them, to feel a pleasure, a shock, a commotion much more intense than at the sight of the previous beauties, as if we were already in contact with real beauties. For here are the emotions that should arise in the presence of any beauty: amazement, delightful shock, longing, love, and pleasant emotion. Such are the emotions that it is possible to experience and that in fact are experienced, even in the presence of invisible beauties, by all or almost all souls, but especially by the most amorous. It is as with the beauty of bodies: everyone sees it, but not everyone feels the same sting. There are those who feel it most, and they are said to be in love.

[10] We must therefore ask those who are enamoured of belle-

: "What do you experience when faced with so-called beautiful occupations, beautiful ways of being, moderate characters and, in general, works of virtue, dispositions and the beauty of souls?"

What do you experience when you see yourselves as beautiful on the inside? And that frenzy, that excitement, that longing to be with yourselves, gathered within yourselves apart from the body, how are these aroused in you?" These are, in fact, the emotions experienced by those who are truly enamoured. But the object of these emotions

What is it? It is not a figure, it is not a colour, it is not a magnitude, but the soul, which 'has no colour' [Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247 c 6] itself and is in possession of moderation and the colourless 'splendour' of others.

virtues, whenever you see in yourselves or observe in others greatness of soul, righteous character, pure moderation, manliness of masculine countenance, gravity and, beneath a cloak of modesty, an intrepid, calm and impassive temperament and, shining above all this, divine intelligence. Well then, even professing admiration and affection for these things, [11] why do we call them beautiful? It is true that they are, and it is clear that they are, and there is no concern that those who see them should call them anything other than what they really are. But what are they really? Beautiful. However, reason still lacks an explanation: what are they that they have made the soul desirable? What is that kind of light that shines in all virtues?

Would you like, then, to imagine the opposite qualities, the ugly things that originate in the soul, and contrast them with the former? The appearance of the what and why of ugliness can easily contribute to the object of our investigation. [12] Let us suppose, then, an ugly, intemperate, and unjust soul, plagued by countless appetites, flooded with turmoil, mired in fear due to cowardice and envy due to pettiness, thinking – when it thinks – only thoughts of mortality and baseness, tortuous from top to bottom, a friend of impure pleasures, living a life befitting someone who finds pleasure in the ugliness of everything they experience through the body. Shall we not say that this very ugliness has been added to the soul as an adventitious evil which, after ravaging it, has left it impure and 'amalgamated' [Plato, *Phaedo*, 66 b 5] with evil in abundance and no longer enjoying a clear life and perception, but living a life clouded by the mixture of evil and fused with death in great quantity, no longer seeing what a soul should see and no longer allowed to remain within itself because it is constantly drawn towards the outside, towards the bottom and towards the dark?

And because it is not clean, because it is led astray by objects that affect the senses, and because it is so intermingled with the physical and so closely associated with and assimilated by the material world, I believe that it changed its form because of its fusion with the inferior. It is as if one were to get into the mud or the slime: one would no longer reveal the beauty one had; what would be seen is that sticky layer taken from the mud or the slime. To that one, then, ugliness came about through the addition of the foreign; and if one wants to be beautiful again, one's task will be to wash and cleanse oneself and thus be what one was.

If we were to say, then, that the soul is ugly because of a mixture, a fusion, and its inclination towards the body and matter, we would be speaking correctly. And this is what constitutes the ugliness of the soul, like that of gold: not being pure or refined, but infected by the earthly. Once this is purged, gold remains, and gold is beautiful if it is isolated from other things and remains alone with itself. [13] For in the same way, once the soul is isolated from the appetites it has through the body because

She dealt with him excessively, freed from other passions and purified of what she had embodied. Once she was alone, she cast aside all the ugliness that originated from her other nature.

For, according to ancient doctrine, "moderation, courage" and 6  
All virtue is 'purification, and wisdom itself is purification' [Plato, *Phaedo*, 69 c]. And that is why the mystery rites are right in saying, with mysterious meaning, that whoever is not purified, going 'to Hades, will lie in the mire' [*ibid.*]. For the impure, because of its wickedness, is a friend of the mire, just as pigs, filthy as they are in body, revel in filth. For what can true temperance consist of but not having dealings with the pleasures of the body, but rather shunning them as impure and unfit for the pure? Courage consists in not fearing death; but death consists in the soul being separated from the body. Now, this separation is not feared by those who like to be alone. Magnanimity consists in disdain for the things of this world; and wisdom consists in understanding, which turns its back on the things below and leads the soul to those above.

[14] Once the soul has been purified, it becomes form and reason, it becomes totally incorporeal and intellectual, and it is wholly integrated into the divine, from which spring the source of beauty and all things of the same lineage that resemble beauty. A soul raised to intelligence therefore enhances its beauty. Now, intelligence and the things derived from intelligence are the beauty proper to the soul, not foreign to it, since then it is truly only soul. And that is why it is rightly said that, for the soul, to become good and beautiful consists in becoming like God [Plato, *Theaetetus*, 176 b], because from him are born Beauty and the other portion of beings. [15] In other words, beings are beauty, and the other nature is ugliness, which is the same as primary evil; therefore, in God, goodness and beauty are also the same thing, or rather, the Good and Beauty.

And therefore, the investigation of beauty must go hand in hand with that of goodness; and that of ugliness, with that of evil. [16] And so, first and foremost we must place Beauty, which is the same as Goodness. From this immediately proceeds Intelligence as beauty. The Soul, on the other hand, is beautiful because of Intelligence, while other things are beautiful because of the Soul, because it shapes them, both those that fall within the realm of actions and those that fall within the realm of occupations. And even bodies, insofar as they are described as beautiful, are made so by the Soul. For since the Soul is divine and a part of beauty, whatever it touches and subjugates, it makes beautiful to the extent that they are capable of participating.

[17] We must therefore return to the Good, which is the object of 7  
the desires of every soul. If anyone has seen it, they know what I mean; they know how beautiful it is. It is desirable, in fact, because it is good, and desire points to the Good; but the attainment of the Good is for those who climb to the top,

For those who have converted and cast off the garments we have put on when descending (just as those who ascend to the holy of holies in temples await purification, the casting off of their former garments and the ascent naked), until, leaving behind everything that is foreign to God on the ascent, one sees for oneself only Him, uncontaminated, simple and pure, on whom all things depend, whom all look to, through whom they exist and live and think, for he is the cause of life, intelligence and being.

[18] If, then, one were able to see it, what love one would feel, what longing, wishing to merge with it, what a delightful shock! For those who have not yet seen it desire it as Good; but those who have seen it marvel at its beauty, are filled with pleasant astonishment, feel a harmless shock, love it with true love and piercing longing, laugh at other loves, and despise the things they previously considered beautiful. It happens to them as it did to those who encountered figures of gods or demons: they would no longer welcome the beauty of other bodies in the same way.

"What would one think if one contemplated Beauty itself, self-subsistent and pure, untainted by flesh or body, residing neither on earth nor in heaven" [Plato, *Symposium*, 211 a-e], in order to be pure? Because all these beauties here are adventitious, mixed and not primary, but come from that one.

If, then, one were to see the one who supplies everyone but who gives while remaining in himself and receives nothing in himself, if one were to persevere in the contemplation of such a spectacle and enjoy it by becoming like it, what other beauty would one need? For this is Beauty itself par excellence and the primary Beauty, transforming those who love it into beautiful beings and making them worthy of being loved. 'And here is where souls face their supreme and final struggle' [Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247 b], and that is the reason for all our efforts not to be left without a share in the most excellent contemplation. He who achieved it is blessed because he has contemplated a 'blessed vision' [Plato, *Phaedrus*, 250 b 6], but wretched is he who did not achieve it. For it is not the one who did not attain beautiful colours or bodies, nor the one who did not attain power, command or a kingdom, who is unhappy, but the one who did not attain that and only that, for the attainment of which it is necessary to cast aside kingdoms and commands over the whole earth, the sea and the sky, in case, after abandoning and despising these things and turning to that, one might succeed in seeing it.

8 [19] –And what is the way? What is the means? How can one contemplate an 'imposing Beauty' [Plato, *Republic*, 509 a 6] that remains there inside, we might say, in its sanctum sanctorum, and does not come out so that one can see it, even if one is profane?

–Let those who can go and accompany her inside, leaving their eyes behind and without turning back to the previous reflections of the body...

Because, when we see physical beauties, we should not chase after them, but rather, knowing that they are images, traces, and shadows, flee towards that of which they are images. For if anyone were to run after them, wanting to catch them as real things, he would fare like the one who wanted to catch a beautiful image floating on the water, as a certain myth recounts, with mysterious meaning, in my opinion: that it sank into the depths of the stream and disappeared. In the same way, those who cling to beautiful bodies and do not let go will drown, not in body, but in soul, in the dark and unpleasant depths of the spirit, where, remaining blind in Hades, they will be here and there in the company of shadows. "Let us flee, then, to our beloved homeland" [Homer, *Iliad*, II, 140], someone could exhort us with greater truth.

[20] –And what kind of escape is that? And how does it work?

–We will set sail as the poet recounts (with an enigmatic expression, I believe) that Ulysses did when he abandoned the sorceress Circe or Calypso, displeased at having stayed despite the pleasures he enjoyed through sight and the great sensual beauty with which he was united. Well, our homeland is the one we are leaving, and our Father is there.

–And what journey is that? What escape is that?

–It should not be done on foot: our feet always take us from one place to another. Nor should you prepare a horse-drawn carriage or a boat, but rather you should dispense with all such means and not set your sights on them. Instead, as if closing your eyes, you must exchange this view for another and awaken the one that everyone has but few use.

–And what does that inner sight see?

–Just awakened, you cannot fully see bright things. You must therefore accustom your soul to look for itself, first at beautiful occupations; then at the beautiful works performed not by the arts, but by so-called good men; then set your sights on the souls of those who perform beautiful works. How can you see the kind of beauty that a good soul possesses? Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not yet see yourself as beautiful, then, like the sculptor of a statue that must turn out beautiful, remove here, scrape there, polish this and clean that until you bring out a beautiful face crowning the statue, so too remove everything superfluous, straighten what is crooked, clean and polish everything that is dark, and do not cease to 'carve' your own statue [Plato, *Phaedrus*, 252 d] until the divine splendour of virtue is kindled within you, until you see 'moderation seated on a holy pedestal' [*ibid.*, 254 b 6-7].

If you have become this, if you have seen this, if you have come together clean with yourself without fearing anything that might hinder you from becoming one in this way and without having anything foreign inside you mixed with you, but being yourself entirely only true light not measured by a

magnitude, neither circumscribed by a figure that diminishes it nor, conversely, increased in magnitude by unlimitedness, but absolutely devoid of all measure as greater than all measure and superior to all quantity; if you saw yourself transformed into this, then, having become vision itself, trusting in yourself and no longer needing the one who guided you once you have ascended here, look from landmark to landmark and see. This is, in fact, the only eye that looks at the great Beauty; but if the eye approaches contemplation with the film of vice and unpurified, or else weak, unable to look at very bright things due to lack of energy, it sees nothing even when another shows it what can be seen. For the seer must apply himself to contemplation only after having become akin and similar to the object of vision. For no eye would ever have seen the sun if it had not been born similar to the sun. Nor can a soul see Beauty without having become beautiful.

Let everything that is deiform and beautiful be done first by those who are prepared to contemplate God and Beauty. [21] For, in his ascent, he will first arrive at Intelligence, and there he will know that all Forms are beautiful and will say that Beauty is this: Ideas, based on the fact that all things are beautiful because of them, because of the progeny and substance of Intelligence. But what lies beyond this, we call the nature of the Good, which has Beauty placed before it. So, if he expresses himself imprecisely, he will say that it is primary Beauty; but if he distinguishes the intelligibles well, he will say that intelligible Beauty is the region of Forms, but that the Good is what lies beyond, the source and principle of Beauty, lest he identify the Good with primary Beauty. In any case, Beauty is there.

## TIMELINE

Homer: 8th century BC

Hesiod: 8th century BC

Sappho: ca. 600 BC

Heraclitus: ca. 500 BC

Empedocles: c. 493–433 BC

Polykleitos: second half of the 5th century BC

Xenophon: c. 430 - after 355 BC Plato: 429-347 BC

Aristotle: 384–322 BC

Cicero: 106–43 BC

Vitruvius: 1st century BC

Horace: 65–8 BC

Dionysius of Halicarnassus: teacher in Rome from 30 to 8 BC. Seneca: 5 or 4 BC - 65 AD.

Quintilian: c. 35-100 AD Dion of

Prusa: c. 40-120 AD Plutarch: ca.

46-127 AD Pseudo-Longinus: 1st century AD Lucian: 120 - after

180 AD Philostratus: ca. 160-249

AD Plotinus: 205-269 or 270 AD



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\* We have added a few titles in Spanish to the author's bibliography in brackets. [*Translator's note*]

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