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**Wolfgang Martynkewicz**  
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**Intellect and Power 1900-1945**

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“Culture is clearly not the opposite of barbarity; rather it is often only a stylish savagery [...]. Culture is a unity, a style, form, attitude, taste, it is any particular intellectual organization of the world, however adventurous, odd, wild, bloody or frightening. Culture can encompass oracles, magic, pederasty, bogeymen, human sacrifice, orgiastic cults, inquisitions, autos-da-fé, St Vitus’s dance, witch trials, the flowering of poisonous murders and any kind of horror.”

Thomas Mann, *Thoughts in War*

## PREFACE

### A BOX AT THE THEATRE OF THE WORLD

As early as 1955 Hannah Arendt had brought up the unsettling fact that totalitarian movements such as Nazism exert a strong attraction on intellectual and artistic elites.<sup>i</sup> How was it possible that a frighteningly high number of intellectually and artistically gifted people had fallen under the spell of totalitarianism? Neither ignorance of the world, naivety or a dull wish to submit to higher authority can be used as an explanation in their case.

History continually offers us reasons to be scandalized and morally outraged. This is also apparent in Arendt's contrasting of the masses and the elites. The popularity enjoyed by totalitarian movements among the masses is certainly frightening, but it is comprehensible; the same cannot be said of the intellectual and artistic elite's attraction to authoritarian and totalitarian worldviews, therein lies something unexplained and disturbing.<sup>ii</sup> The fact that cultured, artistic and fine minds were also enslaved by Hitler has tortured the Germans' image of themselves up to the present day.

In this context people often talk about the failure of the elites. Even from today's perspective, the way intellectual circles, who had long been followers of aesthetic modernism, let themselves be impressed by the 'new barbarians' seems like an unbelievable misalliance and a provocation of our feeling of how things ought to be. For who can avoid the thought that 'they should have known better'?

But what does this indignation imply? First of all, that we bestow on education, culture and art a social and moral authority, and in so doing – whether consciously or not – create certain expectations of how the elites should act. In particular, however, we also assume something else, which is fundamental to the enlightened understanding of civilization: namely, that educated and enlightened minds have a special duty to reject violence<sup>iii</sup> and totalitarian forms of power. Mind and art always appear to be the opposite of power, guarantors of a morality which seems to have separated itself off from the conditions of being in a society; relations based on power and force, in contrast, seem to hark back to the pre-modern or archaic. And has art, particularly literature, not claimed for itself in the twentieth century the function of providing insight – and fulfilled this role? Was it not here that an understanding of the world could be found that the sciences with their increasing specialization had long since lost?

The belief that the civilized citizen was a separate species to the man of violence was, however, definitively shattered by World War I. Before 1914 it had been possible to hold the illusion that there was a secure civilized society, which would prevent any relapses into barbarity. Freud spoke in *Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod (Thoughts for the Times on War and Death)* of the disillusioning sight of cultured citizens laying into each other just as brutally as uncivilized savages. People reacted with astonishment and helplessness to the excesses of violence which even the most excellent minds took part in – whether on the battlefields or in the merciless propaganda wars. According to Freud, however, this disillusion only made visible the ‘destruction of an illusion’,<sup>iv</sup> the erroneous assumption that the level of human culture and intellectual development had put more primitive stages of development firmly behind us. Between culture and barbarity there is no secure border, instead there are fluid borders, which continually allow for regression. Freud nevertheless stressed the importance of culture and a cultural society, as such a society places inhibitions on the individual and makes ‘a large number of people obedient to a culture’,<sup>v</sup> so that they do not follow their nature but suppress destructive tendencies.

After the destructive rages of World War II, and in particular after the monstrous crimes associated with the word Auschwitz, the idea of ‘relapse’ took on another dimension. The disillusion that Freud expressed cautiously is used in Adorno’s dictum that Auschwitz ‘proves the failure of culture’.<sup>vi</sup> This radical denial of culture – ‘all culture after Auschwitz [...] is rubbish’ – articulates the loss of a deeply held belief in the beneficial, civilizing effect of intellect and art. ‘That it could happen right in this tradition of philosophy, of art and of the enlightening sciences says more than just that these intellectual traditions were not able to take hold of people and change them.’<sup>vii</sup> Whatever civilizing capabilities we ascribe to culture, it does not stop people from perpetrating acts of violence and terror or from succumbing to totalitarian worldviews – on the contrary, the history of the twentieth century teaches us that not only can culture and art co-exist with these inhuman outlooks, they can even spur it on with their own thinking and provide the slogans for the forces which seem, at first glance, so opposed to an artistic attitude. It is necessary to abandon the naive trust that contact with art, philosophy and literature is in itself a guarantee of an enlightened understanding and moral integrity.

From the start the Nazis placed a high value on art and culture. They were to create a state based on culture – a *Kulturstaat* – and so, logically, they declared their politics to be the highest art form. Rolf Grimminger has highlighted the paradox ‘that in this most barbaric of all forms of the state that Germany has had, the arts were elevated to a public power’.<sup>viii</sup> He also asks where this preference for art came from, in which tradition it had its roots. His answer: the Nazis’ claim to art and culture followed on from the nineteenth century’s ‘arts religion and its artists’ metaphysics’.<sup>ix</sup> It was in this context that the lofty figure of the artist arose.

This book does not intend to show indignation at ‘culture’s failure’ once more, nor is it concerned with a further representation of Nazism, its roots, its genesis and its development. Rather, it will take what with historical hindsight has become visible to us as a well-ordered stock of knowledge and re-discover it as a state of flux. The location is extremely precise: a Munich home: 5 Karolinenplatz. For forty years, from 1899 to 1941, the publishing couple Hugo and Elsa Bruckmann held a literary salon here. Their fine house was a meeting place for the greatest minds, for artists, musicians, scholars and the literati. When Adolf Hitler took power, the salon became the stage for what was apparently incompatible to meet: a highly intellectual and art-loving elite and the radical right. The story that is to be told here leads necessarily into abysses, yet first of all it takes us back to the experimenting laboratory that characterized modernism, or ‘the modern’, at its start.

That sense of ‘the modern’ now appears alien to us. Its stylistic experiments and artistic visions are part of the aesthetic canon now, but worlds separate us from the excitement that characterized its early years. Around 1900 ‘the modern’ was a hotly debated term. It stood for a new beginning, openness and for being orientated by ‘real’ life. It attested to an attitude that did not refer to the past and its authorities but which surrendered to the dynamic of development. This setting out proved to be a taxing era, asking a lot of the individual, but it was also an exciting and fascinating time. The modern included the demand that the world be seen anew and re-made according to an idea. The modern also included the experience of loss and the fear of an accelerated world, which no longer had a real centre. The call for unity and wholeness became vocal, the call for a ‘different’ modernity. Around 1890 the most influential figures in intellectual life, in art, literature, music and architecture took up positions in this debate.

Around 1900 the intellectuals who frequented the salon of Hugo and Elsa Bruckmann were among the most important advocates of the aesthetic modern, they saw themselves as the avant-garde who were leading Germany's cultural renewal. Their ideas and attitudes opposed both the starched old traditions and the Wilhelminian state's new mass culture. As heterogeneous as the circle was, all its members were confident they belonged to an intellectual elite, all saw themselves as the 'true' moderns, who were not succumbing to the changing trends and the pull of the new, but were struggling for society's rebirth from elemental, cultural roots.

Aesthetic modernism developed around 1900 in a society marked by accelerated processes of rationalization and modernization. These processes undid wide-ranging obligations and unsettled the educated classes. An intellectual orientation and cultural order seemed more necessary than ever in order to give the individual something dependable to grasp hold of. The concepts and figures of thought arising in this context often stood in contrast to society's modernization; they were often of an anti-democratic nature and displayed sympathy for authoritarian ideas. In some quarters there was much looking back to pre-modern, even archaic conditions – this became a characteristic of modernism. In the Bruckmanns' salon new forms of authority and personality were discussed, as was human greatness, the ideal type of the ruler – imagined as a mystical saviour – and the importance of social stations and hierarchies.

There were soon points of contact with totalitarian outlooks, and the experiences of World War I strengthened these. To many, the Nazi ideology was a logical expansion and continuation of their own intellectual world, while at first Nazism opened itself to the modern and had claimed the term for its own movement. In Bruckmanns' salon it becomes clear that the aesthetic modern and Nazism were not two mutually exclusive views, that the avant-garde in literature, music, art and architecture sometimes availed itself of a discourse which had a ready ear for totalitarian ideas.

The Bruckmanns' salon could be renamed a 'scandalon'. There where the artists and academics met, the leaders of the Nazi movement were also frequent visitors from the 1920s. In the Bruckmanns' house, Adolf Hitler made his first appearance before members of the educated, arts-loving elite. They perceived him as an oddity: a man with a riding whip, suede hat and trench coat, his revolver in his belt, a man who did not seem to fit this bourgeois salon

and who gave off a 'kind of demonism'. His first visit occurred on 23rd December 1924, in the period in which the writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal visited the salon, as well as the philosopher of culture Rudolf Kassner and the arts-loving man of the world Harry Kessler. Soon Hitler, Rudolf Hess and Alfred Rosenberg were habitual guests. Only a few years previously Rilke had read from his works and enthused about the magic of the house and his esteemed hostess. Stefan George had made an appearance, the scholar Norbert von Hellingrath had given a talk on Hölderlin's poetry, the Munich art nouveau architect Richard Riemerschmid had called for a society of 'good taste', Rudolf Kassner had spoken on man's greatness and personality, which only reaches the truth when it rises above the 'common, accidental and mediocre'. And Harry Kessler had told of Paul Gauguin, Pierre Bonnard and the sculptor Maillol.

The elegant mansion on Karolinenplatz was open – open to art connoisseurs and lovers, people who desired what was true, good and beautiful, open to the reformers who wanted to renew bourgeois culture with the spirit of classicism, for the enthusiasts who embodied their sworn commitment, for the philosophical adventurers, for the seers and prophets who saw into the distance and had visions, for those who signalled new directions and another modernity.

The Jewish private scholar Karl Wolfskehl and his wife Hanna were just as warmly welcomed in this circle as the openly anti-Semitic graphologist Ludwig Klages. In Walter Rathenau the salon received one of the most brilliant examples of the Jewish-German upper bourgeoisie. The salon felt an intellectual kinship to him, and respected him as an author. Among the house's early friends can also be found the theorist of race and culture Houston Stewart Chamberlain. He was an encyclopaedically minded man who in his works settled scores passionately and aggressively with the tradition of humanist education, and who gave his full support to the highly provocative idea of a Germanic cultural consciousness. The Swiss art critic Heinrich Wölfflin had a completely different temperament. He had started his career as Jacob Burckhardt's successor, a cool and reserved observer and speaker, whose imposing figure exuded the aura of classical scholarship. Wölfflin was a friend of the Bruckmanns, and shared their enthusiasm for Italy's culture, as well as the opinion that a holistic view was needed in the arts and sciences, that literature, art, philosophy and history should represent a unity. Before and during World War I Thomas Mann also frequented the Bruckmanns' house – the 'apolitical' Thomas Mann, who saw civilization as disaster and who argued for a society beyond modernity. The salon was also a favourite haunt of the art lovers Alfred Walter

Heymel and Rudolf Alexander Schröder. Together with Otto Julius Bierbaum they had established the fine artistic and literary magazine *Die Insel (The Island)* in 1899, out of which sprang the Insel Verlag publishing house in 1902.

In this circle Schröder was not talked about so much as a literary publisher as in regards to architecture and interior design. Around 1900 he presented his plans for ‘absolute spatial beauty’. In the salon he met the art critic Julius Meier-Graefe, who at that time was just beginning his career and was a close friend of Hugo Bruckmann’s. For a while the two of them published the *Dekorative Kunst (Decorative Art)* magazine, which Bruckmann had launched in 1897. Meier-Graefe reported from Paris on new trends and fashions. There was even a French-language edition for a time called *L’Art Décoratif*. Hugo Bruckmann thought internationally: to him, good art knew no borders. His magazine, which in 1900 was a forum for the movement for renewal in arts and crafts, aimed to set new standards and play a style-forming role. Even the advertisements were designed by Henry van de Velde. Inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain, they preached an ambitious reform project: art should once again be connected to the rest of life and be active in designing houses and flats, furniture, clothes and other everyday objects. If art’s forming will worked on life, the publisher proclaimed, it could become a mental hygiene and lead life to the truth. In this house there were great expectations of art and literature, a belief in its cultivating powers to re-form, purify and re-establish life.

In order to be able to say something about this chaotic period in history, and make it present for us, this book’s method will be in keeping with its object: the salon, the place – to use Walter Benjamin’s term: the ‘box at the theatre’ – from which history (the theatre of the world) can be observed. Its protagonists are often not sure if they are part of the history they experience, speak and write about. They continually ask if they are really present in it as poets, artists, scholars. They seek an ‘office’ or mission. Moreover, they dream of a new ‘waking era’, which will express the undefined feeling they have. They have a box seat, giving them a privileged viewpoint; they can see the activity from a safe distance and are still involved. The salon is the space where these sometimes opposing views cross each other and meet. Its – to some degree – ‘natural’ form is the co-existence of disparate elements and the simultaneity of what is not simultaneous. This book works with sudden cuts, it changes perspective: from art to art history to poetry and literature; from culture and cultural history to psychology and physiognomy; from personal stories to political events. It follows the

principle at work in the salon, where the most varied of guests, each with their own stories and ideas, meet and for a moment the discourses and tropes connect, meet, repulse each other, dissolve, take on new outlines and drift apart again. There is no protocol, no seating plan, no results in a salon. The discourses are linked by their time and space and yet are unified.

Such a narrative relies heavily on archives with their stock of knowledge and babble of voices. This book makes use of unpublished letters, diaries, notes and documents from Hugo and Elsa Bruckmann's estate, as well as the unpublished papers of Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Kassner, Wolfskehl, Klages and Schuler – to name just a few.

The story of ideas and power that will be told here through primary sources, begins – to use a cinematic metaphor – with a close-up of the salon around 1900, which shows it to be an institution of the 'great and the good' in society, in which there was a meeting of the nobility and bourgeoisie, of property and education. The milieu and settings will be described, but also the salon's history and pre-history, which begins in 1893 in Vienna's famous Palais Todesco, where Viennese high society met. From fin-de-siècle Vienna our gaze sweeps to Munich, where talk was less of the end of a century than of the turn of the century, the start of a new time. In Munich the modern had a different, fresher and more positively expectant look. In 1899 the actual history of the Bruckmanns' salon begins. At the centre of discussion stood a book whose title might have pointed to the outgoing century, but whose content aimed for a renewal of the current culture and society: Chamberlain's *Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (*The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*).

The book's second chapter, 'Another Modernity', gathers together all the major discourses that could be heard in and around the salon in the period up to 1914, from the Decorative Movement inspired by Art Nouveau, to the history of culture and art, and on to physiognomy and the new theories of the dramatic arts. In all the discourses around 1900 there is an ambivalence between a positively welcomed 'modern feeling', which is expressed as a profession of faith in the new, and the simultaneous search for unifying and meaningful forms of life. The intellectual and artistic changes went hand-in-hand with a deeply felt unease with certain modern phenomena – such as mass culture, processes of democratization, advancing industrialization and the specialization of the sciences. This unease was particularly visible in the return to pre-modern and even archaic thinking. The visitors to the Bruckmanns' salon,

who will soon be introduced, met this changing world with theories and visions, which were discussed in the salon in varying combinations and contexts. In close-up anything but a unified picture can be seen, the shapes are pulled into focus when the history of the salon is seen for what it is: the portrait of an era. Then it becomes clear that the ideas and worldviews were linked to each other in numerous ways.

After the excitement of a new start around 1900, shortly before World War I the feeling in the air changed dramatically. The modern was increasingly perceived as a threatening scenario, as a loss of public and inner reality. The outbreak of war was celebrated at first by the salon's guests as something that raised the nation, as the long-awaited establishment of a new sense of community. Only gradually did they realize what was really occurring: a threatening 'shaking of the world'. It put everything in doubt that until 1914 had been believed and held to be right. The old world had collapsed and was irretrievably lost. A series of thematically related individual images can show us how the reality principle of the war allowed a backwards looking thinking to predominate, which investigated Germany's culture's origins and looked to its mythically understood beginnings as a source of renewal.

Germany's defeat in 1918 produced 'states of emergency', the experience of rule by soviet councils proved particularly traumatic for the bourgeoisie – and the Weimar republic was also felt to be a state of emergency for which most of the salon's guests could feel neither political nor cultural sympathy. In addition, the October Revolution in 1917 had triggered a deep-seated fear of a Bolshevik threat, which hovered at the back of every debate and led to the strangest of alliances. The war had held society together to some degree, now society threatened to come completely undone. With horror and astonishment people perceived their era, one that no longer seemed to have the measure of greatness, education, intellect or the right bearing and style in life. As a result the intellectual and artistic elites sought and demanded new conclusions and a new worldview. A notable radicalization of politics ensued. People were increasingly of the opinion that reform was not enough. The circles around the salon discussed power and rule, particularly questions of the true ruler and his mythical origins. A few thought in terms of an intellectual sovereign, others held up Mussolini as their model. The Bruckmanns themselves were quick to see Hitler as the embodiment of a leader, a *Führer*, who could 'heal' a torn people and fragmented country. These discussions about the true and real rulers divided the salon.

In 1933 those people who had given their allegiance to the Nazis programme, thought their wishes had been fulfilled. After the recent ‘time of decay’, the Nazis promulgated the idea of the establishment of a cultural state. A necessary pre-condition of this was a radical ‘re-shaping of the national body’, which promised a new blossoming of the arts. Yet from around 1936 or 1937 the relationship between intellect and power became ever more precarious. In the salon cultural and societal developments were criticized ever more openly, there was indignation at the racial violence against Jews. In particular one figure, who had previously been boundlessly admired and promoted, seemed to move further and further from the ideas and wishes that had been held in the salon: Adolf Hitler. Their vision was destroyed completely in 1945, the work undone. The question remained, how and why intellect had been power’s accomplice.

[...]

## THE STATE AND ART

In November 1933 Gottfried Benn stated that the new Germany’s leadership had a special relationship to art. The fact that its ‘top minds [...] discussed whether Barlach and Nolde could be considered as masters of German painting and whether in poetry there was or should be such a thing as heroic literature’ proved their great interest in questions of art. Art was brought to the public’s attention ‘almost daily as a matter of utmost importance to the state’.<sup>x</sup> Benn was referring to the debate raging in the Nazi Party and in the wider public about expressionism and the abstract artists. The question of what should be part of German literature and art, and what should not, was one of the major cultural controversies in the first phase of the Nazis’ rule. At a meeting in the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin in June 1933, the Nazi German Student Union demanded that the new German art must develop from the tradition of expressionism. The ‘*Brücke* revolutionaries’ (artists of the *Die Brücke* movement, The Bridge) were held up as the creators of a German expressive art; it was time to take up the torch of their revolutionary way of thinking.<sup>xi</sup> Berlin’s Nationalgalerie’s acting director Alois Schardt argued, in the talk ‘What is German Art?’ that he gave in the State Art Library, for a continuation of expressionism and abstraction. He believed that in Joseph Goebbels and the minister for culture Bernhard Rust he had supporters in the apparatus of power who were at least willing to show openness to modernism. On the other side stood Rosenberg and those close to him, they attacked modern art, and expressionism in particular,

in the Nazi Party's newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter*. Artists such as Nolde and Barlach did not represent, as others claimed, the expression of a Nordic will to art, but rather an 'aberration in Germanic art'.<sup>xii</sup>

Benn's involvement in the so-called 'expressionism controversy', in which he as the representative of the expressionist generation was soon the object of the racial nationalists' harshest attacks, is symptomatic of those intellectuals who – to begin with – felt themselves attracted by the Nazi ideology. Benn believed in the connection between art and power, his hope was directed at the new political leadership who showed 'a great readiness for artistic matters',<sup>xiii</sup> and gave the previously sidelined intellectuals a major role to play. Contrary to how it has most commonly been read, Benn's espousal of expressionism was not a defence of the artistic style itself so much as an attempt to defend modern art from the criticisms of the racial nationalists, in order to make it compatible with the Nazi state. 'Art in Germany, art not as an achievement but as a fundamental fact of metaphysical being – that is what will create the future, that is Germany's empire, and what is more: the white race, its Nordic part – that is Germany's gift, its voice, its call to the falling and endangered Western culture'.<sup>xiv</sup> Seen in the light of this 'metaphysical' consideration, Nazism seemed to be born directly of the spirit of expressionism. In his essay Benn draws attention to the anti-liberal position of this 'last great arts rising', to its turn against the 'most wretched bourgeois worldview' and against psychology, the 'purely exploitative world of the sciences' and the 'analytical atmosphere of corporations'.<sup>xv</sup> Expressionism had already taken 'that difficult journey inwards, to the creation stories, to the archetypal images and myths'. And 'in the midst of the horrific chaos of a collapsing reality and of values being turned upside-down' it had already struggled to form 'a new image of the human, finding laws and dependable means to do so'. This revolutionary character, in spite of all the things Benn admitted to be deformities and defects, not only revealed a spiritual kinship to Nazism, but was also the foundation on which the 'great national movement' could now work, create 'new realities' and 'new constructions, new injections of substance into the completely rotten elements of society'. The cornerstone for a 'new art' had apparently been laid with Hitler's assumption of power.

Benn sided with the authoritarian state not least because of the Nazis' claims regarding culture, which brought art close to power. In March 1934 under the Nazi regime the controversial exhibition of futurist painting took place in Berlin. In spite of the attacks of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, Goebbels, Rust and Goering had become honorary board members,

and Eberhard Hanfstaengl, a friend of the Bruckmanns and recently appointed director of Berlin's Nationalgalerie, welcomed the exhibition. Rudolf Blümner, a staunch advocate of expressionism, argued in favour of futurist painting and literature in which he once again stressed the compatibility between this modern spirit and the Nazi state. In his 'Speech on Marinetti', Benn developed and forcefully conjured up his dream projection of state and art. 'Form and discipline: the two symbols of the new empires; discipline and style in the state and in art: the foundations of the imperative image of the world that I see coming. The whole future that we have is this: the state and art.'<sup>xvi</sup>

Hitler emphasized again and again the value of the arts and the role that they were to play in the Nazi state. When it was a matter of art and culture, as he made clear in a speech on 11th September 1935, 'no sacrifice was too great'.<sup>xvii</sup> Political decisions relating to culture should therefore not be guided by financial considerations. 'The opinion that in materially poor times cultural issues should retreat into the background is as foolish as it is dangerous. For whoever attempts to value – or simply judge – culture by its material profit, has no idea of its nature and its purpose.'<sup>xviii</sup> On opening the 2nd German Architecture, Arts and Craft Exhibition in December 1938 in Munich, Hitler enthused about the new theatres and operas that were to be designed with 3,000 seats for the large cities. 'Yes, we hope to raise that figure even higher, as we want the people in their thousands to experience works of art.'<sup>xix</sup> Yet Hitler did not only have monumental buildings and pompous performances of Wagner in mind, he intended to change how people lived. What was at stake was a holistic being that could be changed by art. Art – in a broad meaning of the word – should reach all areas of life as a 'shaper of beauty'<sup>xx</sup> and renew reality from the bottom up, whether that meant the construction of machines or the formal beauty of the automobile.<sup>xxi</sup>

It was not a matter of superficially aestheticizing everyday life, or of the popular enjoyment of art, rather art – and this is where its meaning was seen – should rather become a vehicle that liberated people from their materialistic attitude to life and raised them to another level of being. It was art's metaphysical meaning that Hitler was interested in. He was only marginally interested in contemporary stylistic phenomena, and when he did comment, then with derogatory polemics, for everything that was a style or a fashion was not part of the canon of 'true art'. The artist and the recipient of art had to leave everything ephemeral behind in order to reach what was true. One of the most urgent tasks of the Nazi revolution, according to a speech Hitler held on 5th September 1934, was 'that the artist would be released from the

chains of a constricting mania – in other words: style – in order to follow like a sleepwalker the voice of his deepest inner understanding, and similarly the observer must often also be trained towards this inner revelation.<sup>'xxii</sup> The decline of art was inseparable from the rise of the art critic and from everything intellectual and secondary that stuck to art in order to interpret it. For art was neither to be explained nor refuted. From this view followed the ban on art criticism in newspapers and magazines that Goebbels declared on 27th November 1936. From now on art should only be reported; interpretations and debates were frowned upon.

Having freed itself from style and apparently found itself, art was to take a dominant place in society, no longer producing contemporary work but eternal values. However, an artwork's eternal value can, as Boris Groys has said, only be seen from an end position, from where its value can be determined. It is an 'eternity after the end of politics, after the end of the state, after the end of power'.<sup>xxiii</sup> And, one can add, after the end of a people. In September 1933 Hitler said in one of his numerous talks on culture in relation to politics: 'Even when a nation dies out and people are silent, the stones will speak, as long as there are other nations with a similar cultural heritage.'<sup>xxiv</sup> Hitler claimed that art with eternal values survives the nation or people (the *Volk*) that gave rise to it. Hitler saw peoples as historical phenomena, they came into existence and perished, what was important was the race. As long as a race remained 'pure', then its art was identifiable and comprehensible. 'True art' was not grounded in intellectual attitudes and convictions, but in the identity and sense of commonality in the race, which formed a common material substrate – a corporeal and genetic foundation – both for expressions of artistic genius and for the perception of the artworks. 'No person can have an inner relationship to a cultural achievement which is not rooted in his own origins.'<sup>xxv</sup> Hitler saw the main problem of the way art developed in the Weimar republic as a lack of connection. Through foreign influences people had lost the connection to their roots and lost an inner relationship 'to their own blood', 'to the value of their race'.<sup>xxvi</sup> It was this value that should determine artistic achievement and, above all, the truth of art. It was more important to be authentic than to scale the heights of artistic achievement. In order to be 'true', art must follow a racial system, which also meant that art was independent from history, from social and cultural reality. Its value was judged on whether it could stake out an identity beyond societal developments and temporal events.

More than anything else, Hitler was fascinated by the way art bears witness, how it exists and remains. ‘History rarely mentions a people positively that has not made its own memorial with its own cultural values. In contrast, those who destroy the still visible traces of foreign peoples are simply acknowledged with sadness.’<sup>xxvii</sup> In many of his speeches on the politics of culture he uses the image of the stones that start to speak and so proclaim the eternal values of art, which remain even millennia after the fall of a great culture. In the Bruckmanns’ salon Hitler had formulated these thoughts as a personal credo, and from it art’s meaning for the state could be derived. As Hugo Bruckmann remembered it, ‘in a small circle of artists and people who knew about art, Hitler began to talk once about his views on the state’s relationship to art. Every great era, he said, which gives birth to great thoughts, will also have art – and will find the artists that it deserves. It is not that we are lacking in talent today; no, we are lacking the great idea, the enthusiasm and conviction, the great common task that a people and its art are called to serve. Completely on fire, he declaimed, “If a thousand years hence our descendants do not sift the earth to find the ruins of the artworks of our age – then it was not a truly great age! For each great era will immortalize itself through imperishable monuments and artworks.”’<sup>xxviii</sup> Hugo Bruckmann added: ‘And I had to remember the words that Hölderlin had passed down to us, “. . . This is immortality: everything good, which we think is beautiful, becomes a genius which never leaves us and which accompanies us throughout our life invisibly yet in the most beautiful form, until the grave . . . These genii are born of and part of our soul and only in this part is our soul immortal. Great artists have left us the images of their genii in their works . . . the beautiful gods of Greece are the images of the most beautiful thoughts of an entire people. So it is with immortality.”’<sup>xxix</sup> Indeed, in Hitler’s view art should create something immortal and imperishable which accompanies the living and forms an antithesis to the passing nature of human suffering – art that also has the function of consoling one for the sacrifice of one’s own life and that gives death meaning and a sacred purpose. Only art can achieve such an effect, not material goods, which are ‘of no importance at all’<sup>xxx</sup> in relation to the highest values.

As a great artist – a theme Hölderlin’s words also suggest – Hitler did not see himself as a man of the people but as a lofty genius. He saw himself to be ahead of his time. ‘The genius,’ he said in September 1937, ‘always distinguishes himself from the masses by consciously foreseeing truths that the whole people are only later aware of.’<sup>xxxi</sup> To Hitler, the great artist was always ‘the lone man’, who must assert himself through his work in opposition to the indifferent masses.<sup>xxxii</sup> A ‘trailblazing’ genius stands above ‘so-called precise academic

research'. Before such research has even begun, he has already formed an idea of what is 'right' and 'real' in his art.<sup>xxxiii</sup> In Hitler's concept of the genius, the artist is someone possessed by higher powers, someone who has risen above the day-to-day business of life and formed a new outlook on the world and reality. 'And therein lies the sense of that which we call "art": the ability – by seeing and shaping – to grasp the reality of the time, i.e. what is beyond the present moment, and to reproduce it with the most suitable means. While a normal researcher will gather knowledge and perhaps cautiously take a further step beyond them to a new discovery, which they add to the store of knowledge, the artist can often leapfrog his contemporaries' era and scope by thousands of years.'<sup>xxxiv</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft*, p. 493.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iii</sup> Jan Philipp Reemtsma, *Vertrauen und Gewalt: Versuch über eine besondere Konstellation in der Moderne*, pp. 18 ff.

<sup>iv</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod*, p. 40.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid, p. 44.

<sup>vi</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, p. 359.

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>viii</sup> Grimminger, *Nationalsozialismus und Modernität*, p. 435 f.

<sup>ix</sup> Ibid, p. 436.

<sup>x</sup> Gottfried Benn, *Expressionismus*, p. 76.

<sup>xi</sup> Kirsten Baumann, *Wortgefechte*, p. 144 ff.

<sup>xii</sup> Quoted from Joachim Dyck, *Der Zeitzeuge*, p. 138.

<sup>xiii</sup> Gottfried Benn, *Expressionismus*, p. 76.

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xv</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>xvi</sup> Gottfried Benn, *Rede auf Marinetti*, p. 119 f.

<sup>xvii</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Reden zur Kunst- und Kulturpolitik*, p. 89.

<sup>xviii</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

<sup>xix</sup> Ibid, p.213.

<sup>xx</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

<sup>xxi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Boris Groys, *Das Kunstwerk Rasse*, quoted in Adolf Hitler's *Reden zur Kunst- und Kulturpolitik*, p. 27.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Reden zur Kunst- und Kulturpolitik*, p. 53.

<sup>xxv</sup> Ibid, p. 105.

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<sup>xxvi</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Hugo Bruckmann, *Zwei Episoden* (BSB).

<sup>xxix</sup> Ibid. (BSB).

<sup>xxx</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Reden zur Kunst- und Kulturpolitik*, p. 151.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Ibid, p. 150.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Ibid, p. 150 f.