

ANTI-ART (non-art, post-art, para-art, neo-art, meta-art, anarcho-art, radical art, negative art, etc.)—an internally diversified but ideologically uniform current of contemporary art that is derived from the avant-garde movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Anti-art is a paradigmatic incarnation of the “anti” ideology launched by postmodernism (the New Age). The complementary components of the “anti” tendency in art are the negation of the canon of traditional art based on mimetism (Greek μιμησις [mimesis]—imitation) and kallism (Greek κάλλος [kallos]—beauty), which were replaced by the metacanon of freedom and creativity; art is not a representation (Darstellung) of the world such as we find it nor is it a search for beauty, but it is a cognitive exploration of arbitrary material and the co-creation of the possibilities within it. The abandonment of beauty leads to anti-aestheticism (anaestheticism), the reduction of the role of the world (it is only a materialized illustration of possibilities), and to an accent upon the subjective end of art: the existential transformation of man’s personality (metanoia). The source of the internal differentiation of anti-art and, at the same time, the criterium for its self-evaluation is a consequence (originality) in the departure from tradition.

The genesis of the “anti” ideology in art is connected with an explosion of avant-garde “-isms”, e.g., impressionism, dadaism, expressionism, symbolism, turpism, fauvism, constructivism, futurism, tachism or imaginism, but we can see its affinity with the Renaissance vision of the artist as “like the gods”, supernaturally talented (*disegno—Dio segno in noi; scintilla della divinità; venustatis plenitudo*) a melancholic and individualist, and with an analogical Romantic conception, an artist-visionary who makes his own creative laws: “Kunst ist was sich selbst die Regel giebt” (F. Schiller) or the artist treats art as the domain of accident, “a throw of the dice” (W. Goethe), or he bases his art on the free play of the imagination which recomposes the material into an original and auto-teleological “reality of thought” (C. Baudelaire, A. Rimbaud, S. Mallarmé), or he sees in art “the self-will of genius” or “revolution in permanence” (A. Loos, J. Dubuffet). Yet insofar as the classic, Renaissance, and Romantic vision of art was joined with the theory of genius as a supernatural gift or remained in the framework of the traditional figurative canon, the “anti” ideology in its own way democratizes art and announces that “everyone is an Artist”, and that “art is what is recognized as art” (T. Tzara, J. Cage, J. Beuys), and in the place of figure as the principle for organizing the work it introduces abstraction. Creative individualism (anarchism) is connected with the idea of “bring art back to life”, and even in way liquidating art in order to “disperse” art in life. The often cited but variously formulated reason for the condemnation of tradition is its aestheticism and Parnassianism, the veneration of the motto “L’art pour l’art”, which, in the opinion of the theoreticians and creators of anti-art who for the most part come from leftist social thought, separates art from life and reduces art to an object of so-called aesthetic (non-cognitive and non-practical) contemplation which is proper to class societies in which the ones addressed in art are members of the economically privileged classes (the aristocracy and bourgeoisie). Another reason for the turn to anti-art is the thesis that we must free art from the curatorship of philosophy under which it has remained for more than two and a half millennia, a curatorship that provided ideas and executed the mimetic-kallistic canon (respectively, the figurative canon); the dependence of art upon philosophy leads to theoretical reductionism and normativism, essentialism and institutional censorship, which bears fruit in the parallelism of progress (development) in art and destroys the essence of the human being: creative freedom. The rejection of tradition and the radicalization of the “anti” canon leads to the proclamation of the “death” of art: “Die Kunst ist tod” (the dadaists J. Hartfield and K. Grosz); this sentence applies principally to

traditional art for it expresses the conviction that its canon is logically dead (the creative possibilities contained in its idea have been exhausted), or that this canon is completely false and culturally reactionary, but it also includes anti-art: since everyone is an artist, art loses its autonomy and is immersed in the *Creativicum* (J. Beuys).

The incubation period of anti-art is called the militant avant-garde, while its phase of creativity and freedom which employed the term “anti-art” or its conceptual equivalent (in fullness in the 1970s) is called the period of the triumphant avant-garde or the neo-avant-garde (post-avant-garde). The classicists of anti-art understand history and the ideas contained in the phenomena of “anti”, beginning from the early avant-garde and the appearance of abstractionism, in the concepts of dadaism—neodadaism or conceptualism—neoconceptualism, for accident or the arbitrary thought of the artist are the main principles of modern art (J. Cage, J. Kosuth). We may distinguish the following varieties of anti-art: impossible art or invisible art (skyworks, thinkworks, waterworks, nihilworks), primitive-structure art, ABC art, cool-art, poor art or *arte povera*, land-art, post-art, psychedelic art, primitive art (*l'art brut*), conceptual art, mixed-means art, multimedia art, found-objects art, ready-mades art, body art, environmental-art or *Natur-Kunst*, ambulatory art, montage, collage, fluxus (picaresque art), happenings, action art, and installations. Some speak of its most general models, e.g., a situational model when the theme or material of anti-art is the “common background of our daily life, its spontaneous manifestations and customs” and “found objects” an operational model—dedicated to the “functioning of things and customs with regard to their unexpected outcomes”; a structural model—oriented to natural cycles, ecological structures, to the exploratory juxtaposition of things, places, and customs; self-referential—directed at “such things which speak of themselves”; cognitive—when actions remind us of “allegories of philosophical investigations, ritual training exercises for sensitivity, or educational shows” (A. Kaprow).

In anti-art the material or theme is everything that can be arbitrarily transformed, even only mentally as a thought that cannot be materialized or communicated, according to the principle of abolishing cultural boundaries (taboos, conventions, perceptual habits), and in the name of showing the relativity of everything; the world of nature and culture is a “menu of creative illusion”, the thought and its originality is what counts; the matter of anti-art and the end of its demasking attack is often found in classical works. Anti-art gladly uses such materials as sexual perversions, drastic self-mutilation (amputations and castrations), acts of suicide, animal sacrifices, mentally retarded persons, blasphemous and sacrilegious behaviors, and aggression against the viewers of their action. The destruction of tradition and the demasking of the world of daily experience are done “in the name of saving man’s creative powers” which are threatened by the domination of reason and its totalitarian universalism. Therefore anti-art has no program; its main thread is a “programmless program” based on “vital impulses”, “fragmentation and destruction”, “the anarchistic negation of all values” (T. Tzara, H. Richter, G. Benn, G. Goebel, J. Dubuffet, H. Read). Anti-art is the place of primordial experience (*Ur-Erfahrung*) and integral experience that reveals “infinity and chaos as the true Nature of the world”, as a result of which “the place of one world is taken by many worlds, and the place of one Demiurge is taken by many Demiurges” (M. Duchamp, T. Suzuki, B. Vautier, J. Dibbets, J. Cage, S. Le Witt, T. Ulrichs, D. Karshan).

The “anti” metaprogram in art, in whose framework each person creates according to what he thinks, has the following aspects: (1) ontological—creativity is the first attribute of Nature, and nature is the “space of pure experience”, “the absolute sphere of nonsense”, “illogical nonsense”, “organic expression”, “pure accident” (M. Duchamp, A. Breton, P. Picasso, S.

Dali, M. Ernst, W. Kandinsky, F. Bacon, P. Klee, K. Appel, H. Arp, A. Malewicz); (2) anthropological—man is freedom, and creativity is the key manifestation of freedom, and so man=art (J. Beuys); (3) cognitive—Nature transcends the reason and is inconceivable, but it lies within the scope of “the creative impulse” and irrationality, and therefore anti-art is a cognitive exploration of Nature, the generation together with Nature of unknown possibilities (J. Cage, J. Kosuth); (4) “eschatological”—“anti” is the source of authenticity for man’s being, the condition for his existential metamorphosis; in the new culture (New Age) it performs the function of religion (P. Mondrian, F. Marck, M. Grotowski).

The creators of the “anti” ideology claim that it demasks the fallacy and oppression of the traditional, modern model of culture and liberates culture from rationalism and totalitarianism; “anti” is not just another “-ism” but the logically necessary and historically final stage of human culture. Its critics emphasize that —analogously to the ideology of modernism— “anti” develops from Gnosticism and Manicheanism, and as a simple reversal of modernism it promotes voluntarism with its consequences: relativism and liberalism (anarchism), whereby it pushes culture back to meaninglessness. A complete critique of the postmodernist “anti” ideology and modernism requires us to recall the historical and philosophical background of both currents of thought. The ancient Greeks defined art as a virtue (ἄρετη [arete]), an act of rational production that imitates the teleology of nature and perfects the world, but they went in different directions when they had to define the concept of imitation (μιμησις), beauty (καλλος), and the philosophically crucial concept of nature (φύσις [physis]), respectively arché-being, that “which is really real”. As a result there were three different theories of art each of which presupposed a different theory of reality (ontology): (1) ontological mobilism (variabilism)—the arché-being is motion and non-definition (Heraclitus, Anaximander)—and a “manic” theory of art (Greek μανία [mania]—noble madness); (2) ontological statism—the arché-being is Idea and Invariability (Parmenides, Plato)—and an “eidetic” theory of art (Greek εἶδος [eidos]—idea); (3) realistic metaphysics—nature is the substantial form of the being or concrete individual as the stable basis of changes (Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas)—and a “privative” theory of art (Latin *privatio*—lack or privation). The “manic” conception of art grew from the tradition of Homeric myth; noble madness (μανία, ἐνθουσιασμός [enthousiasmos], πνεύμα Θεοῦ [pneuma Theou]), and this madness comes from the gods. The artist is a medium of divine knowledge and will. Today the role of the mythic gods is performed in anti-art by the positively indeterminate sphere of the *sacrum*. Another context of thought for the “manic” conception sees in art the sphere of free and creative imagination (fantasy) or a manifestation of a cosmic “*vis incognita*” whose first attributes are pure motion (having no purpose) and internal indetermination, e.g. a Game (F. Schiller, L. Wittgenstein), the Will to Power (F. Nietzsche), the Id (S. Freud), Élan Vital (H. Bergson), Being (M. Heidegger), the Inexpressible (T. Adorno), Difference (J. Derrida, G. Deleuze), the Aesthetic (J. Baudrillard). Mobilism introduces ontological dualism: the world of natural experience is an illusion in being and knowledge, and artistic mania reveals the true world and elevates the human being to an ecstatic level of existence (metanoia); the situation is analogous in statism, but the ontological deposit of the world is ideas (Plato), or the Ideal (R. Descartes, I. Kant, R. Ingarden, C. Lévi-Strauss). Both conceptions can be found in neo-Platonism, e.g. nature does not possess a purpose, and art is a utopian, compensating, and therapeutic projection of Ideals (values) upon the world (M. Dufrenne, A. Moles, R. Bayer) or an expression of the absurdity of the world (J. P. Sartre, A. Camus, O. Marquard, W. Weischedel). Modern rationalism and practicism contain a grain of the ideology of modernism—philosophy should be responsible for the reconstruction of the world!—which in social thought is expressed in totalitarian socialisms: communism and nazism-fascism, and is expressed in the theory of art by the

sanctioning of the canon of socialist realism. A historically earlier variety of the “eidetic” theory ascribes to art the functions of disinterested (nontheoretical and nonpractical) cognition of ideal qualities and their possible harmonies (I. Kant). Along with the destruction of the ideology of modernism and “eidetism” is the theory of art which has been accused of enslaving art or of Parnassianism (aestheticism), the ideology of postmodernism and the “manic” theory of art become vocal and launch voluntarism (social liberalism and anarchism) and creationism (abstractionism); works of art illustrate “infinity and chaos as the true Nature of the world”, and so they are “an imitation of Nature in the way it acts” (J. Cage). Statism and mobilism treat art in cognitive terms as a tool for knowing Nature, and thereby they raise its social status. Both of these ontologies and the conceptions of culture that develop from them are fallacious. They do not exhaust the accomplishments of philosophy either in historical terms or in terms of things; the controversy over art and the theory of art must be shifted to the ground of the controversy over philosophy: its object, method, and purpose. A. Gehlen, *Avant-Garde. Geschichte und Krise einer Idee*, Mn 1966; K. Harries, *The Meaning of Modern Art*, Evanston 1968; H. Rookmaker, *Modern Art and the Death of Culture*, Lo 1970; *Surrealism. The Road to the Absolute*, NY 1970; P. Bürger, *Theorie der Avant-Garde*, F 1972; J. Alsberg, *Modern Art and Its Enigma*, Lo 1983; B. J. Craige, *Relativism in the Arts*, At 1983; S. Morawski, *Na zakręcie: od sztuki do po-sztuki* [In the turn: from art to post-art], Kr 1984; H. Kiereś, *Spór o sztukę* [Controversy over art], Lb 1996; idem, *Sztuka wobec natury* [Art in the face of nature], Wwa 1997.

Henryk Kiereś