

Things Said
For, Against,
and About
Beauty

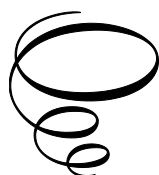
Things Said For, Against, and About Beauty:

*Critical Sources and Issues
for a Lost Conversation*

By

Peter Quigley

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Things Said For, Against, and About Beauty:
Critical Sources and Issues for a Lost Conversation

By Peter Quigley

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Dedicated to my family:

Polly, Daniel, Dylan, Annic, Jeanine, Lily, Logan, Hawi, Finnegan

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements and Permissions	xi
Epigraph	xvii
Part One	
Chapter One.....	2
Historical and Political Context for the Destruction of Beauty	
“The destruction of seemingly irreplaceable values”:	
The Loss of Beauty in the 20 th Century.....	2
Chapter Two	21
“We Are Not OK”	
Modernism: “The Beautiful and the True Do Not Exist”	21
High-Minded Tolerance Nullifies Beauty and Affirmation	25
Opening a Rift Between Art and Beauty.....	33
Rift I: Sculpture: Beauty is not the Defining Attribute.....	35
Rift II, Abstract Painting: Danto’s Rift Between the	
Canvas and the World.....	38
Rift III: Language Separated from the World and Beauty.....	49
Formalism: In Search of an Aesthetic Object	53
From Formalism to Deconstructive Anarchy.....	57
Meaningless Scratches on the Page, Not Windows onto	
the World.....	64
Negating the Affirmative or Declarative Statement:	
The Piano Key Theory	65
Cultural and Political Impacts of Language Theory:	
Woke is Born.....	70
Moving from Language Theory to Structuralism, Culture	
Studies, and Policy Studies	76
Post Truth Structuralism: Marxists Stoop to Talk About Beauty.....	77
From Culture to Policy Studies: The Erasure of Beauty	79

Chapter Three	82
Women, Art, Politics, and Beauty	
Women Suffer at the Hands of the Avant Garde and the Left	82
Women Have Been Strong on Beauty and the Environment	88
Katherine Bates (1859-1929)	89
Terry Tempest Williams (1955-).....	90
Rachel Carson (1907-1964).....	91
Mary Oliver (1935-2019).....	92
Women Standing Up Against Modernist and PoMo Cynicism: Myra Jehlen, Toril Moi, Lisa Ruddick, Wendy Steiner, Elaine Scarry....	92
Chapter Four	101
Case Studies	
Case Study 1	
Lawrence Buell Takes a Knee: Beauty Commits a Felony Hiding the Landscape of Injustice	102
Case Study 2	
Julie Mehretu, John Constable: The Art and Politics of Negating Beauty.....	107
Case Study 3	
Self-Policing, Self-Censoring.....	114
Case Study 4	
Like Renoir, Ateliers Went Back	117
Case Study 5	
Robinson Jeffers: Poet of the Beautiful.....	118
Chapter Five	121
Under Examined Critical Issues Open for Further Research	
Forms and Norms.....	121
Relativism and Instability	127
The Sublime	128
Edmund Burke.....	131
Nietzsche	132
Neutralizing the Emerging Fanaticism and Hysteria: The Sublime in Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860)	133
Release From the World of Will: Pure Perception and Will-less Knowing	137
Robinson Jeffers and the Sublime: Battle is a Burning Flower or a Huge Music.....	139
Jeffers Manages the Light and Heavy Sublime	140
The Apocalyptic, Sinister, Nietzschean Sublime	142

Beauty is a Trick, a Delusion, a Deceitful Ploy 145
 Nature Paints Like a Harlot 145
 WWII Soldiers Deceived by Beauty 147
 Capitalism Deploys Seductive Beauty to Fuel the Greed..... 148
 Aesthetics Is Replaced by Anger, Disruption, and Policy
 Studies: No More “Gush About Sunsets”; No More
 “Idealized Refuge” in Art and Beauty 149
 Volosinov Infects Culture with Marxism at the Cellular Level 152
 Marcuse and the Great Refusal: Nothing is Good or Beautiful:
 You Only Think You’re Happy..... 153
 The CIA and Modern Art: The CIA was behind the scenes,
 but Nelson Rockefeller was out in front..... 155
 Beauty and Relativity..... 161
 Beauty and Evolution..... 167
 Beauty and Neurology 168
 Beauty, the Senses, and the Mind 168

Part Two

Chapter Six 174
 Note to Tzara and Duchamp: The “Beautiful and the True”
 Have Existed for 2500 Years

 Chapter Seven..... 178
 Classical Beauty: Purpose, Proportion, Form
 The Music of the Spheres: “Beauty in the Numbers” 178
 Pythagoras: “There is music in the spacing of the spheres.” 179
 Kepler: The Laws are Buried in the Beauty 180
 The Lost Chord: Ancient Uses and Modern Trends..... 183
 Plato (428-348 BCE), Beauty, the Forms, and Norms..... 185
 Aristotle (384-322 B.C.): The Rules of Beauty 198
 Plotinus (205-270 AD): Startled by the World’s Beauty 200

 Chapter Eight..... 206
 Middle Ages: 476-1453 A.D.
 Dionysius the Areopagite: Bridging the Classical and the Christian . 208
 John Paul Sonnen Talks About St. Dionysius (1 A.D.):
 “All Things Desire the Beautiful and the Good” 209
 Boethius (480- 525 A.D.): In an Age of Profound Crisis..... 212
 Augustine (354-430 AD): God Is Beauty 215
 Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 AD): Faith and Reason 216

Beauty With and Without the Human Mind	217
Aquinas: Beauty, Disinterestedness, and the Appetites	223
Chapter Nine.....	225
The Renaissance: An Explosion of Humanism	
The High Italian Renaissance, 1490-1527	225
English Renaissance: 15 th -17 th Centuries	228
A New Tradition of Skepticism	235
Chapter Ten	241
Romantic and Victorian Beauty: ca. 1790s-1914	
The Unique Individual in a Wondrous World of Nature.....	243
The Torch of Greece Still Lights the Way	244
“All of Animated Nature” and “Something Far More Deeply Interfused”	248
Romantic Beauty Transitioning to Victorian Beauty: ca. 1790s-1914	252
John Ruskin (1819-1900): The Beauty of Imperfection	254
Matthew Arnold (1822-1888): Sweetness and Light; Beauty and Intelligence.....	265
Walter Pater’s “Conclusion” in <i>The Renaissance</i> : The “holy writ of beauty” (Wilde)	270
Dostoevsky (1821-1881): “Beauty Will Save the World.”	273
Chapter Eleven	277
Conclusion: I’ll Take The Urn Over the Urinal	
References	287
Index.....	300

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Poetry

“The Summer Day” by Mary Oliver

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Images

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Fig. 2-4. Photos taken by the author in Oct. 2024; on the Big Island of Hawaii, Pahoā.

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Fig. 2-7. -Johannes Vermeer (Dutch, 1632-1675); *Mistress and Maid*, ca. 1666-67. The Frick Collection, New York Image © The Frick Collection.

Figs. 2-8. Jackson Pollock (1912-1956). *Convergence*, 1952. Oil on canvas. 93 1/2 x 155 inches. Buffalo AKG Art Museum. Gift of Seymour H. Knox, Jr., 1956 (K1956:7). © 2024 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Tom Loonan and Brenda Bieger.

Fig. 2-9. Left. Rothko abandons stacked colored rectangles and covers a whole canvas in black. Mark Rothko *No. 8*, 1964. © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York; photo courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington

Fig. 2-10. Right. Permission from Aldo Chaparro. It is untitled.

Fig. 2-11. The Winner? Xiao Lu, "One 1." 2015. Courtesy of MARS Gallery and the artist.

Fig. 2-12. A drawing by Keats rendered of an engraving of the Sosibios Vase. 1819. In the public domain, CC. See *Wikipedia*

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode_on_a_Grecian_Urn#/media/File:Keats_urn.jpg

Fig. 2-13. “Progress.” This cartoon gets right after the deconstructive and postmodern impetus that has plagued discussions of beauty and meaning for 50 years. “Remove any coherent sense of culture, identity, morality.” Also remove foundations like truth, beauty and goodness in the name of social justice. Reproduction of this comic is permitted under Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 2.5 license. See <http://xkcd.com/>

Fig. 2-14. The image depicts coherence flying away as meaning is lost amidst reflexive systems of language. AI image created and permitted by Daniel Quigley.

Fig. 2-15. The left clings to the oppressor/victim narrative by insisting on a victim culture and a colonialist/oppressor culture. When there is no real or legitimate oppressor, they make it up. They have nothing else. They so desperately want to be heroes fighting “the man.” Expose the lie; reveal the liar. Permission to reprint given by cartoonist, “Stone.”

Fig. 3-1. Marble turned to water over feet. Giovanni Battista Lombardi, a 19th Century Italian artist, born 1823. “Nymph” sculpted in 1852; photo reprinted here with permission from Bruno Bordoni.

Fig. 4-1. “Paintbrush Warrior.” Permission granted by the artist: Mark Henson. 2011. 30x24, oil on canvas.

Fig. 4-2. Julie Mehretu working on “*HOWL, eon (I, II)*, 2016-2017” in her temporary studio, at a decommissioned church in Harlem, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. Copyright: Julie Mehretu. Photo credit: Tom Powel Imaging.

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Fig. 5-5. "Wanderer Above a Sea Fog." 1817. Casper David Friedrich. Credit: photo: bpk Bildagentur; location: Hamburger Kunsthalle; rights cleared: Art Resource, NY.

Fig. 5-6. "Just Stop Oil" at London's National Gallery, Oct. 2022. Leftists see art and beauty as bourgeois targets. Protestors from "Just Stop Oil" demonstrate it's all politics all the time. Permission granted from "Just Stop Oil."

Fig. 5-7. "Myth of the Caves." Even in cartoons that poke fun at pharma as opposed to natural health solutions, the "Myth of the Caves" is readily available to show that deadly distractions lurk in the world of shadows. The reflections on the wall seem to be about health, but in fact they are a dim, shadowy, and distorted copies of the Ideal. Thanks to Mark at "Afterskool100" for reprint permission.

Fig 6-1. *Apollo Belvedere*. Greek, late classical period. Original Greek bronze version, thought to be created between 330-320 BC by the Greek sculptor Leochares. Author of the page where image exists is © Marie-Lan Nguyen / *Wikimedia Commons*. See the link for CC license: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Belvedere_Apollo_Pio-Clementino_Inv1015.jpg

Fig. 7-1. Image from Thomas Stanley's *The History of Philosophy*, c. 1656. Image is in the public domain.

Fig. 7-2. If anything goes, it will. María José Cristerna Méndez, Mexican lawyer and tattoo artist at the First National Middle of the World (Ecuador) Tattoo Convention in 2016.

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Fig. 7-3. Plato's "Myth of the Caves" is readily available in the popular imagination to show that deadly distractions lurk in the world of shadows.

Fig. 7-4. Polykleitos, ancient Greek sculptor, c. 480-420 BC. Considered as one of the most important sculptors of classical antiquity. Known for *The Canon*, a treatise on ideal mathematical proportions for the human body. The writing didn't survive so the statue (sculpted BC 450-440 ca.) was named after the document. Licensed by CC 4.0 generic deed. Carole Raddato <https://www.flickr.com/photos/41523983@N08/14651312165/>
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Fig. 8-1. Hagia Sophia Church was built in 537 A.D., with minarets added in the 15th–16th centuries when it became a mosque.

Photo by Arild Vågen: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:ArildV>. This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0

Fig. 8-2. Boethius condemned. Jean-Victor Schnetz, "Boethius Bids Farewell to His Family," 1826. Photo in the public domain. See <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/how-to-find-consolation-in-this-time-of-purification>

Fig. 8-3. "North Rose Window," Notre Dame, Paris: groundbreaking 1163; completed, 1345.

Julie Anne Workman, CC BY-SA 3.0

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Fig. 8-4. "Cloisters of Gloucester," England: groundbreaking 1089; completed 1482. Saffron Blaze, CC BY-SA 3.0

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Fig. 9-1. Michelangelo was only 26 years old in 1501, but he was already the most famous and best paid artist in his days. He accepted the challenge with enthusiasm to sculpt a large-scale *David* and worked constantly for over two years to create one of his most **breathtaking masterpieces** of gleaming white marble.

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Fig. 9-2. Leonardo da Vinci's famous and iconic drawing of the human form emphasizing beauty and science. *Vitruvian Man*.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitruvian_Man

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Fig. 9-3. "The Abduction of Proserpina" (detail), by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. 1621-22. Galleria Borghese, Rome.

According to myth, Proserpina was picking flowers one day with her mother, Ceres (Demeter), and caught the attention of Pluto (or Hades), the God of the Underworld. Emerging from the ground in a fiery chariot, Pluto abducted Proserpina and carried her back to the Underworld to be his queen. CC License found here: This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Rape_of_Prosepina_September_2015-2b.jpg

Author: Alvesgaspar.

Fig. 9-4. 18th-century woodcut depicting Giordano Bruno dreaming of a universe beyond the visible universe.

Fig. 10-1. "Wanderer Above a Sea Fog." 1817. Casper David Friedrich.

Credit: photo: bpk Bildagentur; location: Hamburger Kunsthalle; rights cleared: Art Resource, NY.

Fig. 13-1. Taken by the author in his yard.

Fig. 13-2. A view of the Aegean from the Parthenon. Photo and permission by Pam Burns. 2023.

EPIGRAPH

“Beauty entails a sense of the sacred. It surrounds something with an aura of inviolability, a taboo on violation. I am mightily attracted to the object while, by a countervailing and equal force of reverence, held back from it. I am stopped in my tracks, rooted to the spot. *Beauty is a standoff.*”

-Peter Schjeldahl 1998

Elaine Scarry has noted in *On Beauty and Being Just*, “The banishing of beauty from the humanities in the last two decades has been carried out by a set of political complaints against it...[It] distracts attention from wrong social arrangements. It makes us inattentive and ... indifferent to the project of bringing about arrangements that are just” (Scarry 1999, 57).

“You must remember that we were not very much later than Ruskin, Pater, Swinburne, and Matthew Arnold: our atmosphere was that of poets and persons touched with religious enthusiasm or religious sadness. **Beauty (which mustn’t be mentioned now) was then a living presence.**”

-George Santayana, 1928

“The first major claim of modernism is a content claim: a demand for a recognition of the truth that **the world is not beautiful**. The world is fractured, decaying, horrifying, depressing, empty, and ultimately unintelligible.”

-Stephen Hicks 2018, 250

Albert Magnus states that a virtuous thing in the world possesses a **“clarity which made it beautiful even if it was not known to anyone,”** our response to beauty is not determined by what we think of an object but by the “splendor which inheres in it.”

-Umberto Eco 1986, 26

“Inhumanism is a means of maintaining sanity in slippery times; it has objective truth and human value. It offers a reasonable detachment as rule of conduct, instead of love, hate and envy. It neutralizes fanaticism and wild hopes; but it provides magnificence for the religious instinct, and satisfies **our need to admire greatness and rejoice in beauty.**”

-Robinson Jeffers. “1948, Preface to *The Double Axe*”

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is symbolic as well as actual beauty in the migration of the birds, the ebb and flow of the tides, the folded bud ready for the spring. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature—the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after the winter.”

-Rachel Carson. *The Sense of Wonder*.

“[T]he revolution we know as modern art” wishes to “destroy the renaissance...destroy beauty.”

-Barnett Newman. “The Sublime is Now,” 1948.

And in all things that live, there are certain **irregularities and deficiencies which are not only signs of life, but sources of beauty.**

-John Ruskin. *Unto This Last* 1997, 92.

“Beauty? It seems to me that beauty is an example of what the philosophers call reification, to regard an abstraction as a thing. **Beauty is a series of experiences. It is not a noun.**”

-Louise Bourgeois. “Sunday Afternoons: A Conversation and a Remark on Beauty.” 1998.

“We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure.”

-William Wordsworth, 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*,

Dionysius sees **the universe is an “inexhaustible irradiation of beauty, a grandiose expression of the ubiquity of the First Beauty, a dazzling cascade of splendor.”**

-Umberto Eco. 1986, 18.

Beauty is the “Cause of the harmony and splendor in all things, flashing forth upon them all, like light.”

-Dionysius in Umberto Eco. 1986, 18.

“To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence. At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist till Art had invented them.”

-Oscar Wilde. “The Decay of Lying” in *Intentions*. 1891.

“As soon as beauty is sought not from religion and love, but for pleasure, it degrades the seeker.”

-Ralph Waldo Emerson. “Art.” 1841.

“Value is thus always central to the meaning of beauty. We often say that something or someone is beautiful, in fact, when what we mean is that they have value for us.... a beautiful object is something we value, and we value it because it touches our dearest concerns. In our gratitude toward what moves us so, we attribute to it the property of beauty, but what we are actually experiencing is a special relation between it and ourselves.”

-Wendy Steiner. *Venus in Exile*. 2001.

A fresh hand snatches the hilt of the light, the torch flies onward...
 Hand kisses hand in the dark, the torch passes...it lighted
 The little homely Ionian water and the sweet Ægean
 ...the torch northering

Lighted the Atlantic...**O flame, O beauty, and shower of beauty...**

-Robinson Jeffers, “The Torch-Bearer’s Race,” (1988, 99-100).

“The laws are buried in beauty.”

-Andrew Brown paraphrasing Kepler. “The Music of the Spheres.” 2009.

“Beauty—be not caused—It Is—

Chase it, and it ceases—

Chase it not, and it abides...”

-Emily Dickinson. “Beauty—be not caused—It Is.” 1862.

“The poet is not to make beauty but to herald beauty; and beauty is everywhere; it needs only senses and intelligence to perceive it.”

-Robinson Jeffers. Unused “Preface, Fragment.” 1922.

“We, Kant states, *demand* that others would assent to this judgment. Thus, when it comes to the beautiful, there is an ‘oughtness’ implied; aesthetic taste is not just a matter of particular tastes. Aesthetic taste is universal.... **as Kant points out, it is laughable to consider something as beautiful only for me.**”

-Laura Mueller. “Kant’s Project.” 2022.

“Taste is the faculty of judging an object or mode of representing it by an entirely disinterested satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called beautiful.”

-Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Judgment*. 1790.

“Goodness brings about beauty because goodness allows the thing to carry out that for which it was originally put together as a thing in the first place. Goodness dwells in the beautiful thing as harmony and proportionality, for the beautiful thing is always harmonious and proportionate.”

-“That/Which” summarizes Plato in “Plato on Beauty and the Beautiful.”

“Beauty is not always lovely.”

-Jeffers. “Fire on the Hills” 1989 [1932], 173.

“One day Dostoevsky threw out the enigmatic remark: ‘Beauty will save the world.’ What sort of a statement is that? For a long time, I considered it mere words. How could that be possible? When in bloodthirsty history did beauty ever save anyone from anything? Ennobled, uplifted, yes—but whom has it saved?...So perhaps that ancient trinity of Truth, Goodness and Beauty is not simply an empty, faded formula as we thought in the days of our self-confident, materialistic youth?”

-Alexander Solzhenitsyn. “Nobel Lecture.” 1972.

“Is it true, prince, that you said once that ‘beauty’ would save the world? Gentlemen!” he shouted loudly, addressing the whole company, “the prince asserts that beauty will save the world!”

-Fyodor Dostoevsky. *The Idiot*. 1869.

“People need beauty as well as bread.”

-John Muir. *The Yosemite*. 1912.

“A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

-Aldo Leopold. *A Sand County Almanac*. 1949.

“Thus, the beauty of music, according to Boethius, is not to be sought in the merely sensual enjoyment it gives, but in the mathematical patterns that underlines it.”

-Umberto Eco on Boethius (480-425 B.C.). *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*. 1986.

“To an extent that would have been difficult to imagine thirty years ago, art and education have become handmaidens of political radicalism. Standards in both have plummeted. **The art world has more and more jettisoned any concern with beauty and has become a playground for bogus ‘transgressive’ gestures.**”

-Roger Kimball. *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 60s Changed America*. 2000.

“High-minded tolerance that fails to make judgments is not just mistaken, Bloom argued, it is a deeper betrayal of the university’s founding purpose. That is, to harness tradition, **the best of what has been thought and said**, in order to mold young souls—Bloom believed in souls—in pursuit of excellence for its own sake (yes, he believed in that, too).”

-Thomas Chatterton Williams. “The Prophets: Allan Bloom.” 2024.

“Beauty demands to be noticed; it speaks to us directly like the voice of an intimate friend.”

-Roger Scruton. *Beauty*. 2009.

“For at least the last hundred years, art has defined itself less by the pursuit of beauty than by suspicion of it...[T]he recent art that has received the most attention...challenges traditional canons of beauty—and which, at times, challenges its audience’s ability not to flinch.”

-A.O. Scott. *NYTimes Magazine*. 2001.

That Beauty is not, as fond men misdeem,
 An outward show of things, that only seem;
 But that fair lamp, from whose celestial ray
 That light proceeds which kindleth lover’s fire,
 Shall never be extinguished nor decay;
 But, when the vital spirits do expire,
 Unto her native planet shall retire,
 For it is heavenly born and cannot die,
 Being a parcel of the purest sky.

-Edmund Spenser. “Beauty.”

“Maybe we shouldn’t be too troubled by that commonsensical skepticism, however. Even if it is not yet clear what is meant by intrinsic value, we have no difficulty in understanding someone who says, of a picture or a piece of music that appeals to him, that he could look at it or listen to it forever, and that it has, for him, no other purpose than itself.”

-Roger Scruton. *Beauty*. 2009.

“There is geometry in the humming of the strings. There is music in the spacing of the spheres.”

-Pythagoras

“Not by coincidence, the ancient Greek word for ‘beauty,’ *kalos* or *kallos*, also means ‘goodness’ and ‘excellence.’”

- David Fideler, “How Beauty Can Save the World.”

“It is yet more surprising to find *Genesis* in league with each of the above, for in *Genesis*’s opening chapter the refrain so quietly insistent, ‘And God saw that it was good,’ contains a Hebrew word which may be translated either as good or as beautiful. **The feel of the whole chapter changes if one hears God proclaim that the light, the sun, the greenery, the animals are all beautiful, and mankind very beautiful.**”

- Andrew Cueno. 2009.

The confidence with which philosophers once trod it [path of beauty] is due to an assumption, made explicit already in the *Enneads* of Plotinus, that truth, beauty and goodness are attributes of the deity, ways in which the divine unity makes itself known to the human soul.

-Roger Scruton. *Beauty*, 2009.

On Ruskin’s changing views of beauty: “As he became more interested in justice, he grew less interested in beauty.”

-Dinah Birch, “Victorian Beauty: Ruskin’s Changing Ideals,” 2023.

“We no longer dare to believe in beauty and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance. We can be sure that whoever sneers at her name as if she were the ornament of a bourgeois past—whether he admits it or not—can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love.”

-Hans Urs von Balthasar. 1961.

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF BEAUTY

“The destruction of seemingly irreplaceable values”: The Loss of Beauty in the 20th Century

My studies over the last 15 years have centered on the various intersections between beauty, culture, the environment, politics, and art. The research has increasingly focused on the fate of beauty in a culture that is under stress, a culture that is being undermined by having its values distorted, twisted, attacked, and erased. It seems clear that to pull the foundation out from under a culture, one attacks beauty, “logos,” truth, goodness, and purpose. As it turns out, destroying beauty is upstream of destroying a culture. In the US, UK, and the West generally, the idea of beauty has been under severe attack for over 100 years. Most of this book was written in 2024 during the run up the Presidential elections. Now, the election has concluded, and a new political party will be moving into D.C. dedicated to stopping what it sees as the failing, declining, and downward trends in U.S. and Western culture. Will there be a renaissance or simply a momentary plateau halting the downward trending lines of decline.

Cultural collapse is a traumatic event, and its impact ripples out for years, even centuries. In Part II, I discuss the life of Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, or just Boethius (480-425 B.C.), who lived through this traumatic experience of cultural dissolution. In Part II, I report that in the midst of cultural break down and collapse, Boethius hung on to the enduring qualities of beauty, symmetry, and order. In *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, Umberto Eco (1986, 30) reminds us that Boethius was living in “an age of profound crisis, an age occupied with **the destruction of seemingly irreplaceable values.**” In addition to seeing values crumble like Corinthian, Ionic, and Doric columns, “**The classical world was vanishing before his eyes.**” Meaning, order, purpose, the irreplaceable values, were falling down around him. Eco goes on to say “The break-up of Europe had reached one of its most tragic moments. **Boethius sought refuge by holding to values which could not be destroyed.**”

The last Roman Emperor, Romulus, was deposed by “barbarians” in 476 A.D., right about the same time as Boethius was born (475-77 A.D.). In the ensuing powerplays, Boethius achieved high station in the post-Roman period during the rule of Theodoric, the Ostrogoth King. Eventually tensions rose, and Boethius was accused of treason and executed.

Currently, thinkers like Victor Davis Hanson are pointing out that something like this is happening to us in the West, now. Many historians and commentators talk about a world they have grown up with that seems to be disappearing or is already no more, a world that is “vanishing before their eyes.” Many talk about “the destruction of seemingly irreplaceable values.” The “pill” and the various liberation movements of the 60s pale in comparison to the attack on norms recently put forward by those advocating sexual surgeries for minors, no borders, and other programs on the left. It’s no accident that the last plate in Thomas Cole’s 5-plate series on civilization, “Destruction,” is on the cover of Hanson’s new book, *The End of Everything*; that painting resides in these pages as well.



Fig. 1-1 Thomas Cole. *The Course of Empire*. 3 out of the 5-plate series: “Arcadian,” ca. 1834; “Consummation” ca. 1835-36; “Destruction” ca. 1836. Permission granted by and photography ©New-York Historical Society.

Hanson (2024), in a recent audio/video, “The United States is Done,”¹ says “We are in the middle of a cultural revolution. It’s not a political revolution like 1776; it’s more like the French Revolution of 1789; or I think it’s really close to Mao’s second revolution, the Cultural Revolution. It’s not about politics; it’s not about conservatives vs. democrats. **It’s holistic**; it spans every aspect of life. If I said 10 years ago that in 10 years, the following would happen nobody would believe it.” His list is familiar. Everyone I know has lists that are similar, mostly characterized by overreach by the government, surveillance, canceling, and censoring, and Orwellian-level lying on the part of the media. My own lists are long and multiple.² Here are just a few items from his list and mine:

- Biological men will compete in women’s sports, dress and shower in the same bathrooms. Young boys and girls will be encouraged to have gender reversal surgery.
- Opposing these developments or saying there are only two genders will get you dismissed from school, fired and ostracized. Opposing experimental vaccine gets you the same.
- 2.3 million or more people will illegally enter the country each year. We are instructed that we must house them, feed them, educate them, transport them, and more. If we don’t agree, we will be called xenophobic and racist.
- There will be no southern border. Don’t bother trying to “close it” because it isn’t there.

¹ <https://t.co/KKIfkcZR6c>

² Erasure of the Republic with calls to add 2 new states, pack the Supreme Court, dissolve the Electoral College, end the Filibuster, and more. Erasure through exclusion of straight, white, male voices and presence. Kill Charlie Kirk. Erasure and attack on “whiteness”; not just a color but a mindset, a value system (see *Newsweek*, “In Smithsonian Race Guidelines, Rational Thinking and Hard Work are White Values” (July/2020 updated May 2021). Erasure of borders and energy production. Erasure of gender lines. Erasure of merit; replaced by equity: everybody gets a trophy. Erasure of history; rewriting of history; destruction of monuments, claims of systemic racism. Erasure of beauty. Erasure of free expression. Erasure of the justice system via weaponization. Erasure of the family. Grievance culture permanently installed. Launch MeToo “movement.” Fund and launch “Just Stop Oil”: attack beauty and art; support Antifa; anarchists. BLM: racial based violence. Occupy Wall St. Pro-Hamas riots at US Universities and a call for global intifada and end of the West.

Hanson (2024) ends his list with this: “A decade ago, nobody would believe any of this would be possible. Yet, this is all happening as we live through **a nation-destroying cultural revolution.**”³

Censorship, surveillance, cancelation, lawfare, and a press that lies in the moist brazen manner, all of the above⁴ puts more fear and uncertainty in the population⁵ and, therefore, makes room for authoritarian impulses to move in. The corrosive forces have been coalescing, and one can see the impacts all around.

Hanson is not alone in his assessment. In 1990 Joseph Tainter published *The Collapse of Complex Societies* which analyzed how things fall apart, and more recently Michael Anton (2021) in *The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return* had this in his Amazon blurb showcasing his book. The left, he says,

has become the party of ‘identity politics’ —and every one of those identities is **defined against a unifying national heritage of patriotism**, pride in America’s past, and hope for a shared future.

Offering only antagonism based on group identity—whether race, sex, or something else—the Democrats look forward to imposing nationally what they have achieved in California: one-party rule in a lockdown nation, where the ruling class makes every decision and doles out benefits to favored groups.⁶

³ <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/08/954760928/twitter-bans-president-trump-citing-risk-of-further-incitement-of-violence>.

⁴ <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FD/FD00/20230309/115442/HHRG-118-FD00-Wstate-TaibbiM-20230309.pdf>;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FNj_asppG98;

<https://www.amazon.com/Laptop-Hell-Hunter-Secrets-President/dp/163758105X>;

<https://nypost.com/2020/05/07/fbi-lovebirds-lisa-page-peter-strzok-conspired-in-michael-flynn-case/>; <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-peter-strzok-page-texts-treason-mueller-russia-2018-1>

⁵ See <https://medium.com/@kootie73/cloward-piven-strategy-the-cloward-piven-strategy-named-after-sociologists-richard-cloward-and-664cdc29a254> or <https://jacobin.com/2016/02/frances-fox-piven-bernie-sanders-hillary-clinton-black-lives-matter>

⁶ Making this point in real time, an online article from *The Daily Caller* just posted a list of expenditures from the LA budget for gay choirs, trans cafes, and social justice art, and more at a time that the mayor cut the fire department budget. Her response to the fire department budget cut seems defensive at best: none of the reductions made “would have impacted the situation that we were dealing with over the last couple of days.” She added that the city is “in tough budgetary times.” Something doesn’t add up. See <https://dailycaller.com/2025/01/09/los-angeles-karen-bass-fire-budget/>

For the purposes of this book, I can't underline enough the importance of Anton's phrasing here: "every one of those identities is defined against a unifying national heritage." The 20th and the 21st centuries have been busy inviting and inciting the removal of foundations and coherence, the very material that centers and unifies a culture. This process warps every norm, every stabilizing element in life, especially beauty.

How does one account for the overwhelming negative and negating treatment of beauty, of the US and the West, a negativity embraced and perpetuated by the artistic and academic classes as well as the media, much of corporate culture, the left-wing political culture which dominates Democrats, and a socialist youth culture in areas like Seattle, Portland, Boston, San Francisco, Chicago, and Boulder? In the 20th century, there has always been an anti-western, anti-capitalist Marxist element chewing away at the margins of the liberal democracies. These forces always fomented hate, chaos, doubt, paranoia, and violence; they have positioned classes and races against one another; they have harbored and sought refuge in unsuspecting political parties, in the arts and humanities, and bohemian enclaves, finally nestling, nurturing and propagating in academia.⁷ Historically, the negating, disbelieving, scoffing, oppositional forces wait for moments of crisis or weakness, such as economic depressions, social disruption, or war, and then these forces will assert themselves, gaining more ground at one point, losing at another.⁸

One of the more powerful elements of the undermining corrosiveness has been **the postwar WWII consensus**. After the horrors of WWII subsided and warring nations were neutralized, it was decided that the way forward was to abandon the alleged conditions that spawned such conflict. Nation states were the problem. Germany, it was thought, wasn't an anomaly but a likely outcome in all nation state dynamics. These tribal structures, it was alleged, with their adherence to their special histories, art, monuments, language, triumphs and grudges, rituals, racial and geographical identity, were a recipe for fascism and must be destroyed. R.R. Reno (2019, 2) summarizes the sentiment:

Rather than reinforcing dominant social norms, society should loosen up and allow for greater freedom and experimentation. The 'animal spirits' of the economy need to be freed from oppressive regulations; borders should be porous and open to commerce; and cultures need to expand their imaginative boundaries to welcome the contributions of new peoples. The world benefits

⁷ See my last book, *The Forbidden Subject*, for the way the radical left moved from the streets of Paris '68 to the halls of academia: 61, 86, 92, 95, 102.

⁸ See my discussion in *The Forbidden Subject* of the "weak" western democracies as seen in intellectual circles in the 1930s and after: 119, 131, 180-185.

from creative innovation, not conventional thinking. The spirit of openness, not dutiful obedience, is what we must cultivate.

Fair enough and a seemingly well-intentioned assessment and antidote for what had been seen in the first half of the 20th century. It is unfortunate that sociopolitical diagnoses can't be tested in the lab like medications or vaccines. This assessment and solution were accepted widely and deployed. As Reno (2019, 3) reports, George H.W. Bush was an adherent and advocate of this vision:

George H. W. Bush was the quintessential establishment man. His views were moderate and conventional. When he praised open borders, open trade, and open minds, he was relying on an adjective that had acquired an entirely approbatory connotation in the postwar West. He could be confident that term would arouse warm feelings and evoke images of a peaceful and humane future.

The popular author of this assessment was Karl Popper; his book on the topic was *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. The book, according to R.R. Reno (2019, 4), was enormously successful in the decade following WWII. The thesis of the book, according to Reno, attacked

'state-worshipper' and other proponents of 'collectivism.' They are the cause of the world's troubles. Such people must be dealt with firmly; anyone who relishes his homeland and its history is a 'racialist,' according to Popper. The vice affects more than the German people. It is a present danger in every nation. One can see how Popper anticipates our own era and its paranoid rhetoric. If someone worries about the effects of immigration on his nation's culture, he is xenophobic. If he organizes a political party that seeks to restrict immigration, he is a fascist.

It's not hard to see how conclusions like this were sketched after experiences with Germany, Japan, and Italy during WWII. The intense focus on mythology regarding the German "race," for instance, became a fetish and something that led to the mass murder of "others." **However, the implications for the US and the West as targets for undoing seem to have gone terribly awry.** Destabilizing of the alleged "oppressor" State is having enormous impacts on the US population and the West in general. Turns out, those on the left opposed to the "nation state" can become as "collectivist" and tribal as the marching fascists in WWII they use as foils for their arguments. All brands of leftist organizations have been marching in lockstep to undue the American nation state. They demonize past leaders and documents of the founding as they propose or imagine a utopian aftermath (a la "Imagine" by John Lennon) after the destruction of the current nation state. Also, as we shall see, **presaging this undoing, the emerging modernist,**

abstract painting movement throughout the 20th century, provided a window onto the ugly, unsavory, unraveling to come. More of this below.

Using Germany as the template for why nation-state structures are by design and in essence a problem is a troubled syllogism. In psychology, an individual (or nation) who thinks too highly of himself can lapse into a malevolent narcissism, or, even worse, become a sociopath; on the other hand, self-confidence is critical for risk taking, staying hopeful, and persevering through adversity. The person who has no center of being, no confidence, no self-affirming narrative becomes increasingly ill and is likely to act out in destructive ways or wither away. The same goes for nation states. At each of these stages, it's an amusing thought problem to ask, "What kind of art gets produced by these various psychological/political profiles?"

Here's where we see "openness" as a powerful diluting catalyst that if not checked will erode all foundations, beliefs, reason, and groundedness. Ultimately, by opening too widely one allows anything to go. Scott Russell Sanders (1993) discusses the issue of the lack of foundations and rootedness from another perspective in *Staying Put*. He (Sanders 1993, 103) quotes John Berryman's reply to a question regarding his roots. Berryman "ridiculed those who asked about his 'roots' ('as if I were a plant'), and he articulated something like a credo for...rootlessness":

'Exile is in our time like blood. Depend on
Interior journeys taken anywhere.
I'd rather live in Venice or Kyoto...but
O really I don't care where I live or have lived.
...my wits about me,
memory blazing, I'll cope & make do.'

Sanders (1993, 103) comments on Berryman's claim: "**It is a bold claim from modernist, psychic bravado**, but also a hazardous one. For all of his wits, Berryman in the end failed to cope well enough to stave off suicide." In all of these arenas of identity, gender, globalization, borders, and meaning, what we see is intentional destabilization that leads to criticism of a sense of place, a gender, a nation state, or anything solid. **Some memorable slogans have come from the left as a result: Since gender identity is blurred, "love is love"; and since borders are blurred and negated, "no person is illegal."** Social norms, geographical boundaries, bathroom borders, gender clarity, meaning, truth, beauty, and so much more, are erased. **Within the apparent relativism, however, there are decidedly focused attempts to hierarchically increase the standing of some groups as opposed to others. Currently, western culture is at the bottom; illegal**