



Seeking Beauty in Art: Some Implications of a Thomistic Statement about Glass Saws

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Abstract

Starting from a statement of Thomas Aquinas to the effect that even though a saw made of glass would be more beautiful than one made of iron, it would not fulfil its artistic end, it is argued that we have largely lost an awareness that the fine arts in their pursuit of beauty must also have a connection to some end, just as the saw does to cutting, and that seeking beauty in the abstract and divorced from such an end has had deleterious effects, including the loss of the artist's social role, the disappearance of the fine arts from everyday life and their replacement by objects of mass culture. This process is particularly illustrated by the history of the connection between poetry and music.

Keywords

art, beauty, culture, music, poetry, Thomas Aquinas

Beauty has nothing to do with art! This sounds monstrous!
- Eric Gill¹

It is curious that some of the most important statements in St. Thomas Aquinas are said only in passing, as it were, seemingly tossed off in the course of an argument, but of immense importance and interest. For example, his often-cited statement that “grace does not abolish nature” is said in the course of a reply to an objection in an article that discusses whether sacred doctrine makes use of argument.² Another example of this is the passage I wish to consider here, a comment likewise contained within a discussion concerned with another point,

¹ *A Holy Tradition of Working: Passages from the writings of Eric Gill* (West Stockbridge, Mass. : Lindisfarne Press, c. 1983), p. 79. Originally from *Work and Property*, 1937.

² Cum enim gratia non tollat naturam. . . . *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

but pregnant with its own meaning. For this statement, also in the *pars prima* of the *Summa Theologiae*, contains in germ a conception of art very different from that which is common today, and one moreover which I believe has implications for our social and even economic practices and institutions. This remark occurs as part of his discussion of the *dispositio*, that is, the arrangement and qualities, of the human body. In the course of this discussion Thomas notes that every artist [artifex] intends the best disposition of what he is making according to its purpose or end. He writes, “And if such a disposition has with it some defect, the artist is not concerned; just as the artist who makes a saw for cutting makes it from iron, so that it is suitable for cutting; he does not care to make it from glass, which is a more beautiful material, because such beauty would be a hindrance to its purpose.”³

On the face of it, St. Thomas’s explanation is simply common sense. Who would make a saw out of glass? But if we proceed further in our consideration of this passage, we see that making a saw out of glass, even though that would result in a more beautiful object, would in fact be an impediment to art itself, the art of the saw maker, that is. In fact, the pursuit of beauty here is in opposition to art. But why is this a difficulty? It may be thought that the kind of art represented by saw-making has nothing to do with beauty, and that beauty is only a concern of the fine arts. But if we look at Thomas’s well-known definition of art as *recta ratio factibilium*, the right conception of a thing that is to be made, we can see the connection.⁴ For under this definition of art is included both the art of the maker of saws and that of the maker of pictures, symphonies or statues. Though certainly these arts differ, they differ as species of a genus, and in our understanding of that genus, art, lies an understanding of the place of the fine arts, of beauty, as well as of the artist, in society.

However, we must deal with a difficulty in that usually the fine arts are no longer conceived as art in the sense of *recta ratio factibilium*, and thus their connection with the more humble arts of making pots or bottles or saws is entirely forgotten or denied. For the fine arts are now commonly regarded as focusing on beauty directly and for its own sake, although as a matter of fact this pursuit of beauty has sometimes led to an entire loss of beauty, or rather, to its subordination to

³ Et si talis dispositio habet secum adjunctum aliquem defectum, artifex non curat; sicut artifex qui facit serram ad secandum, facit eam ex ferro, ut sit idonea ad secandum; nec curat eam facere ex vitro, quae est pulchrior materia, quia talis pulchritudo esset impedimentum finis. I q. 91, a. 3.

⁴ *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 57. In article three Thomas states that “ars nihil aliud est quam ‘ratio recta aliquorum operum faciendorum,’” and in article four “ars est ‘recta ratio factibilium.’” This latter wording is repeated elsewhere including in the Prologus or Prooemium to the *Secunda Secundae* and in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, lib. I, cap. 93.

the taste or whim of the artist. But it seems to me, that only if the Thomistic conception of art is recovered is there any possibility of doing away with art objects which have neither beauty nor purpose and sometimes even offend our aesthetic sensibilities, and at the same time of regaining for the artist a healthy place in a social order.

Perhaps the best way to approach this is by quoting from the English artist and essayist, Eric Gill (1882–1940), who, although if not usually classed as a philosopher, nevertheless was one of the most faithful and radical disciples of St. Thomas on art.⁵ Gill wrote:

Music, if it be separated from occasion (the wedding, the funeral, the feast, the march and the Mass) is, like modern abstract painting and sculpture, nothing but a titivation of the senses, and all that can be said of worshippers at the Queen's Hall is that they have possibly more refined tastes than those of children dancing to a barrel organ. But whereas the children, like new-born lambs, dance for exercise, the devotees of the concert are more like debauchees at a Roman feast - and if music entered the stomach instead of the ear, owners of concert halls would have to supply spumatoria. They have no *use* for music - they only want to enjoy it. Music as we know it today, in its latest developments, is nothing but a refined sensationism, a refined debauchery, psychological auto-erotism à deux, à trois, en masse. The history of music during the last 400 hundred years is the history of the progressive divorce of music from occasion, and the high talk musicians indulge in is no higher and no more precious than that which birth-controllers use to extol physical union. . . . From Palestrina to Bartok and Stravinsky the history of music is a progress from meaning made attractive by music, through Handel and Gounod who straddled the fence, to music made attractive by meaning nothing at all."⁶

In order to better understand what Gill means here, we must look further at St. Thomas's definition of art as *recta ratio factibilium*. Something is to be made. But of course made for a purpose. And if so, then that purpose must govern everything about the making: the material used, its external form, etc. If it is a saw, it must be made of some strong material, not of glass, even if glass is more beautiful. But again, an objection will be raised: Why should we care if the

⁵ In this respect Gill seems to me to follow St. Thomas more closely than an acknowledged Thomist and philosopher, Jacques Maritain, in his *Art and Scholasticism*. Although Maritain begins by rightly remarking (p. 21) that "the ancients did not give a separate place to what we call the fine arts" and notes the entire dependence of all the arts on their basic meaning as *recta ratio factibilium*, nevertheless he seems to forget this and in the rest of his book to treat the fine arts as having a direct relationship with beauty, seemingly different in kind from that of the other arts. In any case, he does not stress the basic unity of all the arts and what follows from such a unified conception of art. *Art and Scholasticism and The Frontiers of Poetry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974).

⁶ *A Holy Tradition of Working*, pp. 89–90. Originally from *Work and Property*, 1937.

saw is beautiful? Indeed, can we really say that a saw is or could be beautiful? Let us explicate this again from Eric Gill.

The idea that the distinction between art and fine art is that art is skill applied to the making of useful things and fine art is skill applied to the making of things of beauty, is clearly unreasonable - because there is no reason why useful things should not be beautiful, and there is no reason to suppose that beautiful things have no use. Are tables and chairs and houses and pottery necessarily ugly? Are portraits and statues and church paintings and wall decorations necessarily useless?⁷

To an extent we recognize this in daily life. Manufacturers of automobiles and even of bottles do take steps to produce objects that are pleasing to look at. But this is without an explicit realization that the relationship of both the more humble arts as well as the fine arts to both use and beauty is essentially the same.

All human arts must be rooted ultimately in our capacity and need for external objects of various sorts and for various purposes: houses, pots and pans, saddles, candles, music, pictures, etc. Yet when we make any such thing, our natural instinct is to make it as beautiful as possible. No one, all things being equal, would make an ugly pot if he could make a more beautiful pot that was equally useful. But as Thomas pointed out in the passage I quoted at the beginning, beauty when seen as something abstract or as something pursued for its own sake, cannot be what the artist aims at. A glass saw might be beautiful, but not very useful for sawing. It is only *beauty in relation to some end*, that is, some *use*, which art properly aims at.⁸ When beauty is pursued as an abstraction and as the only goal of an art, this means that the relation of that art to any use has been forgotten. And when it is thus divorced from use and instead beauty is pursued for its own sake, then, paradoxically, this can even end up destroying beauty itself, a point which I will discuss further below.

The fine arts were originally accompaniments of important human activities, especially worship of God or the gods. Naturally beauty, as in any other kind of art, was desired, but beauty for a particular purpose. Music for the liturgy is not the same as music for a march or for a dance. Each has its own particular kind of beauty because each has its own particular use. A musician would fail as an artist if he pursued beauty but made his work less useful for its purpose.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 93–94. Originally from *Sacred and Secular*, 1940.

⁸ In the fine arts the artist works toward the same generic end as in the other arts, a certain use enhanced with appropriate beauty. How then do the fine arts differ? It would appear that in the accomplishment of that end, the fine arts allow for greater freedom because their end is less determined. For example, while there is comparatively little difference in the way that a saw can be made if it is to be useful, a composer of music for the liturgy or for a dance has greater freedom with regard to accomplishing his end, and thus more opportunity for greater and more direct engagement with beauty.

“We must not forget that until the end of the eighteenth century the great musicians were only artisans, members of a craft; that they were also great musicians is only incidental.”⁹ The impressive and beautiful, but liturgically useless, compositions of the last several centuries, such as Verdi’s *Requiem* or even Bach’s *Mass in B minor*, are actually less perfect as works of art because beauty was pursued at the expense of purpose, as if they were saws made of glass.

Now it might be objected that although the fine arts *can* be useful at the same time as being beautiful, there is nothing wrong with pictures or music that aim at beauty alone, at being looked at or listened to without reference to any other end simply for the sake of esthetic pleasure. It might seem so if we limited our consideration to the works of art themselves and neglected the question of the social and cultural effects of art. Certainly the nineteenth century abounded in such works, symphonies, paintings, statues, which, because they had no social role, were exhibited or performed in special places segregated from ordinary life, such as museums or concert halls. Many of them are indeed beautiful in the highest degree. But what comes of this? What effects do such works of art have on a culture?

In the first place, the fine arts, when divorced from any social role, become the property only of those who have leisure and education to attend to them. The rest of mankind, who formerly might have heard the most magnificent music at public worship or viewed paintings or statues of the highest order in their churches, no longer comes across such works in everyday life. Very often even those works which were intended to adorn churches or other public buildings are now found only in museums, and the best liturgical music is heard not during the liturgy, but as recorded music or in concerts. This produces a schism in a culture, about which I will speak further below.

Secondly, now cut off from a public role, which in the past made them accountable to princes, bishops, cathedral chapters or guilds, artists increasingly became responsible only to themselves. It is true that someone else usually has to pay the bill, but, even when the content of the arts began to become esoteric and sometimes even ugly, the prestige of the fine arts, the desire to belong to or patronize the arts coterie, the “arts community” as it is called in the United States, exercises such an attraction that many of the rich are only too happy to pay out large sums for works which it is difficult to believe anyone really finds attractive. To quote Eric Gill again,

These special people are quite cut off from the ordinary needs of life and so they become very eccentric and more and more peculiar and

⁹ Alfred Einstein, “Early Concert Life” in *Essays on Music* (New York: Norton, 1956), p. 28.

their works become more and more expensive and so they are bought only by very rich people and so artists have become like hot-house flowers, or lap-dogs and so their works are more and more as peculiar as themselves and so we have all the new kinds of 'art movements' and so what we call Art (with a large A) is now simply a sort of psychological self-exhibitionism.¹⁰

The maker of fine arts became in a way cut off from the common culture, to the detriment of his art, of the culture, and sometimes even of his personal character.

In the Middle Ages the plastic artist paid lip service at least to the lowest common denominators of experience. This even remained true to some extent until the seventeenth century. There was available for imitation a universally valid conceptual reality, whose order the artist could not tamper with. The subject matter of art was prescribed by those who commissioned works of art, which were not created, as in bourgeois society, on speculation. Precisely because his content was determined in advance, the artist was free to concentrate on his medium. He needed not to be philosopher, or visionary, but simply artificer. As long as there was general agreement as to what were the worthiest subjects for art, the artist was relieved of the necessity to be original and inventive in his 'matter' and could devote all his energy to formal problems. . . . Only with the Renaissance do the inflections of the personal become legitimate, still to be kept, however, within the limits of the simply and universally recognizable. And only with Rembrandt do 'lonely' artists begin to appear, lonely in their art.¹¹

Left to himself, without the external but healthy discipline by which he must express beauty while at the same time achieving a social and public purpose, where was the artist to turn? In the first place he turned to his art, to the very process of creating.

This constraint, once the world of common, extraverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art and literature have already imitated the former. These themselves become the subject matter of art and literature. If, to continue with Aristotle, all art and literature are imitation, then what we have here is the imitation of imitating. . . . Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miró, Kandinsky, Brancusi, even Klee, Matisse, and Cézanne derive their chief inspiration from the medium they work in.¹²

But just as the pursuit of sexual pleasure apart from any reference to its natural procreative function eventually can lead to perversion

¹⁰ "Art in England Now. . . As It Seems to Me" in *It All Goes Together: Selected Essays* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1944), p. 91

¹¹ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, c. 1961), pp. 16–17. Cf. Maritain, *Art and Scholasticism*, pp. 158–60, note 43.

¹² Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," pp. 6–7.

or even sexual boredom, if not in any particular individual, certainly in society as a whole, so the pursuit of beauty alone too often led to a kind of artistic perversion and even a boredom that sought in the most unlikely ways to stimulate both the artist and his viewers or listeners. What is the electronic music of a John Cage, for example, except the pursuit of ever more and more esoteric means for a music that has no purpose and thus no standard by which it can be judged? For the purpose of a thing, its final cause, is always a standard against which it can be judged: How well does it fulfill its end? But if the fine arts have no purpose whatsoever, neither to adorn the worship of God or to provide a good beat for marching or dancing, or even (in the end) to please their viewers or listeners, how are we to judge them? Even the criterion of beauty is now gone, since the artist is free to disregard it if he chooses. A work of art with no purpose cannot really be judged at all. For while purely formal criteria may remain, which are not necessarily of no importance, they provide no sufficient standard against which to judge any particular work of art. A pot may fulfill any formal or technical criterion one likes, but if its maker has not sought utility together with appropriate beauty, he has failed in his chief duty.

If we look at the passage from St. Thomas again, he points out that a saw ought not to be made from glass because in that case it is not fitted for sawing. That is, when the genuine end of an art is recognized, then the object created by the art will be sound and healthy and fulfill its end, but in addition the relationship of the artist and the things he makes to beauty will likewise be well ordered. An iron or steel saw can be as beautiful as its maker can contrive, provided that it is still useful for sawing. But if saw-making were governed merely by the fantasies and whims of saw artists, saws might be made of glass or paper or anything at all. There is no limit except the inventiveness of the artist. But of course makers of saws have no pretensions. They do not aspire to do anything but make a useful object, perhaps beautified in such ways as they can manage. But the same is not true of the fine arts. There, since the social use of their art has largely vanished, the artists can now usually work free of the end inherent in their art, and thus simply create, with no constraint.¹³ But with what result we shall see.

¹³ In fact, the modern conception of art turns on its head the classical meaning of the term, which had subordinated the form of the thing made to its use. For example, "...we have often observed that the composer of art music is at liberty to choose from a wider variety of solutions to a particular problem than the composer of practical music. Indeed, it might be said that *art imposes freedom upon the composer*—freedom to determine for himself the limitations of the system within which he shall construct a design... He need not take into consideration any extrinsic determinants that might confine his imagination..." Joseph Agee Mussulman, *The Uses of Music: an Introduction to Music*

The loss of a social purpose for the fine arts led not only to the segregation of art and artist from society but to the cultural schism I mentioned above, an enmity between high and popular culture, and made easier the eventual displacement of popular culture by mass culture. Let us see how this occurred in the arts which make use of human language.

While the arts of painting, sculpture and music were being separated from their social functions, something similar was going on with the arts that make use of the spoken word. The theater, of course, had had intimate connections with religious festivals, both in ancient Greece and in medieval and baroque Europe. Now, however, dramatic performances are akin to concerts and art museums, that is, they are special events separate from the rest of life and reserved for those with sufficient leisure and interest.¹⁴ They are no longer part of the community's public and corporate life. But an analogous process has occurred even with poetry.

Originally there had been a very close relationship between music and poetry.¹⁵ In ancient Greece the typical setting for poetry was "a fusion of word, music, and dance" which Kirby-Smith calls *mousike*.¹⁶ For the poet produced both for and within a community, not in the privacy of his study. The bard's recitation was "a mixture of memorized recitation and improvisation," that is, the poem was in part made up on the spot, in part recalled from an immemorial tradition of previous performances.¹⁷ This is true, moreover, in every pre-modern culture. Based on studies of living epic traditions in the Balkans and Finland,

Authentic, or oral, epics, as they have been handed down to us, are transcriptions of a highly sophisticated oral performance; they are not scripts or texts written down in advance of performance by the performer.¹⁸

The words "performance" and "performer" here are important, for even if the bard did not always dance, his singing of the poem had more in common with a dance performance than with someone sitting down in his study to read the *Iliad*. But contrast that with the writing of poetry as a private act.

in Contemporary American Life (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, c. 1974), p. 159. (Emphasis in original.)

¹⁴ Film making, however, although it likewise does not fulfil a social role as I am using that term, nevertheless has obtained a wide popularity. But it does so (with few exceptions) as part of *mass* culture.

¹⁵ H. T. Kirby-Smith's book, *The Celestial Twins: Poetry and Music Through the Ages*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, c. 1999), which I follow here, provides a masterful account of the relations between poetry and music from antiquity until the present.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Horace's poems give every evidence of being carefully labored, and Virgil is said to have spent an entire day reducing ten or twelve lines into a perfected one or two hexameters. In place of an hour's oral recitation - a mixture of memory and improvisation - one finds a year's meticulous labor as the literary epic took the place of the authentic, or oral, epic. The connection with music disappeared almost entirely.¹⁹

In the change described here, at least three distinct but related things were happening. The most obvious is the severing of the connection between music and poetry. But this change is simply the necessary result of the other two changes that were occurring. The other two changes concern the social context in which poetry was produced and performed. In the second place then, instead of poetry as part of a public performance with evident social implications, we now have quiet writing in the study which brought about (at least eventually) equally quiet reading in the study. Thus both the poet and his audience are now alone, solitary, no longer part of a community which nourished poetry and in reference to which the poet did his work.

Equally important is the third thing that happened here, which likewise follows from the creation and reading of poetry as a solitary act. This is the separation of high cultural poetry from popular poetry. Previously the poetry sung by the bard had to be acceptable to all social classes, for the community for which the poet sang, and of which the poet was also a part, comprised the whole of the population. The poet had to provide entertainment for the masses, as well as for others. In England the type of dramatic entertainment that could please all social classes persisted until the closure of the theaters in 1642. A good example of such a poet and dramatist is Shakespeare, whose plays include both scenes of slapstick as well as the most sublime poetry and tragedy.

Such changes in time brought about the complete disappearance of poetry from life. Now that poetic/musical performances were no longer the concern of society as a whole, poetry began that slow withdrawal from life which has been nearly completed in our time. To be sure, there were many vicissitudes in this process, new outbreaks of popular poetry and music, but in the end, they came to nothing. The scene in *Beowulf* of the bard's performance gives a picture of this lost type of entertainment, a poetic/musical performance that we have replaced with television.

Then song and revelry rose in the hall;
 Before Healfdene's leader the harp was struck
 And hall-joy wakened; the song was sung,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

Hrothgar's gleeman rehearsed the lay
Of the sons of Finn when the terror befell them.²⁰

This kind of poetry naturally included music, just as so many variety shows on television include singing and dance.

For our present purposes, though, the point to be noted is that the divorce of poetry from music signaled its divorce from everyday life, first retreating into the privacy of the study, then vanishing altogether. The things that I mentioned above that caused and accompanied the separation of music from poetry - the different context in which poetry was made and heard or read and the separation of high cultural poetry from popular poetry - are of course akin to what happened in the other arts. When poets, like painters, were functional artists, people still remembered that the fine arts were arts in much the same way as pot making or dress making are arts. They had public and social ends and public and social uses.

In the cultures of Homer and *Beowulf* and the Middle Ages, the best music and the best visual artistic works were part of life. People saw and listened to them as parts of ordinary community life; they adorned their churches and guild halls. Today such artistic works have been removed from ordinary life and put into special times or places such as concerts or museums or poetry readings, events which are not seen by the average person as something of interest. And although there was sometimes a distinction between high cultural and popular cultural works in the past, it was a distinction not an enmity, and the two traditions continued to nourish each other.²¹ Rustic villagers may not have danced to the works of John Dunstable or Josquin des Prés, but they still moved in a world in which high culture was not cut off from ordinary life but appealed to and sustained the entire people, since it was an integral part of the corporate life of the entire people.

In addition to the tragic separation of the artist from a real social role, the removal of the arts from society both created that unnatural separation of high culture from popular culture, and, with the rise of our commercial and industrial civilization, also brought about the death of popular culture. For what is often called popular culture

²⁰ *Beowulf*, translated by Charles W. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, c. 1940), p. 35.

²¹ The influence of popular culture on high culture is well-known and has continued even into our own time. Less widely realized is the existence of an influence in the opposite direction. "We also know little about the age of the various styles of folk music in Europe. Still, we are sure that for centuries there has been a close relationship between the art music of the continent and its folk music. . . ." and "The ballad was developed in Europe in the Middle Ages - first, presumably, by song composers of city and court - and evidently passed into oral tradition and the repertoires of folk cultures thereafter." Bruno Nettl, *Folk and Traditional Music of the Western Continents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 2d ed., 1973), pp. 38 and 52.

today is in reality *mass* culture. Popular culture is produced and performed according to traditions handed down in a particular place, and such an artistic tradition can hardly survive in today's world of electronic communication and mass-produced music and pictures. Ironically, though, it is in the products of mass culture that one finds functional art flourishing: music intended for dancing, poetry sung to music, paintings or statues intended to stimulate religious devotion or patriotic feelings. Unfortunately, largely cut off from healthy cultural roots and often produced with an eye solely for money, most of these rightly excite disdain in the minds of high culture artists, who fail to see that they themselves have contributed to the conditions which have led to the predominance of such mass culture.

In speaking of the deleterious effects which the segregation of the fine arts and of the artist himself from an ordinary social role have had on the course of Western culture, we should not adopt too narrow a view of this. As in many matters, it is a question of what predominates. If the arts are generally seen in their rightful place as part of society and as having a social role, then the poetry or music which is enjoyed by an individual alone will not adversely affect things. Certainly there have always been such private reading and music making, and this is as it should be.²² But when such private use of the fine arts is preponderant and seen as the norm, then we will experience the bad results of which I have spoken.

Although it is possible to chronicle the history of the various types and forms of the arts in a purely formal manner, noting how particular technical problems were successively approached and solved, nevertheless the forms of the arts are always symptoms and effects of social and cultural realities. The various ways in which artists work and exercise their art and in turn interact with the other members of society presuppose certain forms of social order, and can in turn themselves be causes of social change. For example, the massive orchestral works of the nineteenth century were possible only because the institution of the concert had emerged in the preceding

²² Although apparently there was originally some uneasiness about this on the part of artists. "Beethoven was the first example, and a dangerous one, of the 'free artist' who obeys his so-called inner compulsion and follows only his genius. A hundred years before, this attitude of the composer toward his art and toward the world was quite unheard of; in the case of J.S. Bach it appears that he was afraid to come forward with his most intimate and lonely works, the *Inventions* and *Sinfonias*, and later the *Well-tempered Clavier* and the *Art of Fugue*, without having some special pretext. Therefore he disguised them as pedagogical examples 'for the use and profit of the musical youth desirous of learning as well as for the pastime of those already skilled in this study.' Music that did not have a religious or social function still needed some excuse. Even Haydn and Mozart hardly ever wrote music that did not have some such defined purpose." Alfred Einstein, "Beethoven's Military Style" in *Essays on Music*, p. 244.

century.²³ And the art museum was possible only because painting and statues were no longer created for some social use, while in turn the very existence of museums has meant that high cultural objects are now created with the intent of being kept out of sight in special buildings, while the products of mass culture are able to invade our public spaces. And if all this is true, then it behooves those who are concerned with the arts not to overlook the impact of the social role of both arts and artist.

St. Thomas's off-hand remark about saws, then, implies an entire theory about art as well as of the place of the artist and the arts in society. When the fine arts are divorced from their ends, when they pursue beauty without regard to social use, then they become subject to the private whims of the artist. They also begin to be separated from the ordinary life of society, allowing the rise of mass culture, which is inimical to both high culture and a true popular culture. But a recovery of the meaning of art as *recta ratio factibilium*, with all that is implied by that, can make possible an integration of art and the life of the artist with the social order, to the health and benefit of all three.

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²³ "The concert audience came into existence with the oratorios and concerti grossi and organ concertos of Handel. . . . In earlier times there was no audience in the modern sense. The church was the only place where a musician was able to reach a fairly large audience - but it cannot be said that the congregation was a real audience with an interest in musical and esthetic values. A church musician serves the church. A churchgoer is there for edification and music is only a means to an end. . . . In the past it was very difficult to listen to music just for enjoyment, as a 'connoisseur'." Alfred Einstein, "Early Concert Life" in *Essays on Music*, pp. 26–7.