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III^d Theme

Every day life and value of forms

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One must begin by expressing a doubt as to the precise meaning of the title chosen by our Italian colleagues for this theme. I shall assume that we are required to discuss the place of formal aesthetic values in objects of daily use - that is to say, in the products of machine manufacture : industrial design.

Even before the days of machine production, a valid distinction was made between the fine arts and the crafts, between the artist and the artisan. This was essentially a vocational distinction, and did not imply an esthetic evaluation. A human being with his sensibility was directly engaged in the creation of formal values : he was in direct contact with his matière.

The machine divorced the artisan from his matière, and that is the factor which has given rise to a new problem in aesthetics.

Let us review the essential stages in the creation of a work of art :

- 1) sensibility towards a material - a sensation of the virtues of a particular material (paint, stone, metal, clay, etc ...). The indispensable sensuous basis without which there is no work of art.
- 2) an unconscious assimilation of, or imitation of an archetypal form. The materials sensuously apprehended are then autonomously shaped into the patterns of human perception and cognition. Psychologically speaking this stage represents the oscillation of the creative activity between the surface and depth levels of the human psyche.
- 3) an intuitive adjustments of such forms (sensuously apprehended and autonomously shaped) with an external situation - the "insight" that such forms fit a given situation. The inner articulation of the archetypal forms (as style, mannerism, metaphor, imagination).

The "external situation" may be a feeling situation (e.g. emotional relationship to another person or group of persons, or to a landscape), but in art "the myriad forms of subjectivity" (Susanne Langer) need an objective correlative in formed materials. In the fine arts and in the handicrafts the artist may begin with a feeling he needs to express, but more likely he begins with the manipulation of materials and the construction of forms (sensation plus cognition) and the emergent creations are then associated with a feeling situation. But the same work thus created may have different emotive significance for different people (e.g., an African mask has one significance for the tribesman who made it, and another significance for the European aesthete). But its sensuous and formal significance is universal.

On the basis of this summary analysis of the artistic process, it may be asserted that the objects in daily use must possess the sensuous and formal qualities that are basic to all works of art, but that their relation to an external situation (in this case, *la vie quotidienne*) is not necessarily a feeling-situation. We should not look for emotive expression in the products of the machine. ~~Workmanship is not an emotive expression in the products of the machine.~~ The adjustment to an external situation (the third stage in artistic creation) is satisfied by a sense of fitness - fitness for purpose. This "insight" of fitness is sufficient to give an industrial product aesthetic justification, always provided that the basic requirements of a work of art (sensuous exploitation of the virtues of the material) exist. It may be questioned whether there is any adjustment of the materials to archetypal patterns of human perception, but one has only to analyse the typical forms of modern architecture, for example, to demonstrate their presence. The "moduler" is never arbitrary: It is an archetypal form based on the experienced proportions of the human body. (It is possible, as one critic has maintained, that all formal values in the plastic arts relate to the human body).