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" THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ART HISTORY AND ART CRITICISM "

Report of André Chastel :

Artistic literature only found its original form after the Renaissance, as a consequence of Modern Art; in its first state, in the academic age, its main preoccupation is to demonstrate by History the truth of certain norms of taste that are used by Criticism to judge the evolution of Contemporary Art . The recent idea of a science of art, corresponding to the rise of Archeology, later gave way to a History-Explanation apparently liberated from all critical cares; and, against it, the idealism, so helpful in Italy for our disciplines, firmly maintained the idea of an Art History being a function of Criticism, that is to say aiming at emphasizing the spiritual act, present in the real work of art, and at separating this from the host of works usurping that name . Hence the affirmation that "Criticism and Historiography should be increasingly philosophical".

It has been rightly argued that this view induced an alteration of both History and Criticism by a sort of mystique of the "pure act" identical in every art, and could neither make History ("pure acts" are not linked) nor Criticism (they do not allow comment). And it seems indispensable to distinguish more clearly the two functions and to consider more humbly their concrete relations without forgetting that History and Criticism depend upon speech.

In so far as it is comparable with the Act of Memory, History is subject to all sorts of subjective limitations but its aim is fundamentally objective and its ideal field would be Humanity at the limit of its efforts : the work must be considered first of all as an event, that is to say as a fact, subject to definite conditions, and as a more or less strong factor in a specific evolution . One of the original phases of this work is the attribution which links the work to an artistic personality, but the historic effort goes beyond this operation, it is a question of restoring "the forms in Time" in a complex speech which would exclude at the same time any naive idea of liberty and any great hegelian or neo-hegelian system. The personal reaction has to submit to this perspective which makes of it the last episode in a series which starts with contemporary evidence, always so precious in giving "tone" to the historian : knowledge and sensibility are subject, in him, to a characteristic tension .

It tends to disappear when Contemporary Art is in question : the necessary effort before a work of art is no longer an effort of the memory but one of the attention which perceives in the object what is worth remembering; therein lies the real act of Criticism . Its original moment is the judgment of value, but the reasons adduced, the work of analysis, the ability to restore, by a play of poetic equivalences, the fields of sensibility implied, form the real work of Criticism where speech is concerned and give it its signifiace . Thus it favours the interiorisation of aesthetic experience and the consciousness of its different degrees, of its inexhaustible aspects and the triumphal play of subjectivity .

The two activities are only distinct in principle; they communicate, for Science is not made and subjectivity gets tired, and they are to a certain extent, interior one to the other . But little controlled interactions between one and the other give the impression of a crisis of artistic literature; a rather profound reflexion about the method should allow us to establish how the two functions can collaborate without difficulty .