

PHILOSOPHY AND ART CRITICISM.

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Insofar as methodical development is concerned, all scientific research implies some relation with philosophy as the science of human knowledge. And since in art criticism this relation is particularly evident, one wonders whether this is due to the nature of its object or the nature of its method. Against the latter hypothesis is the fact that art criticism cannot be tied down to one particular philosophy; there are many methods and forms of research, and each depends on a different philosophical experience; but to whatever type this experience belongs, it is more intense in criticism than in any other activity or discipline, and in art criticism more than any other critical activity. It is easy to understand why criticism implies a more intense philosophical experience than other scientific activities, above all, those of an experimental nature; but it is harder to see why art criticism is more closely bound up with philosophy than other critical processes, for instance literary criticism. We should totally exclude the argument that this philosophical character depends on a larger conceptual content in a work of figurative art, since it is easy to prove that the dominant character of the figurative work is visual and not conceptual and that all serious criticism tends to underline and justify these visual values.

It is precisely these visual values which call for and justify the philosophical interest of the art critic, often leading him to link a question of aesthetics with a direct evaluation of different artistic facts. This implies, on the one hand, the recognition of the insufficiency of aesthetic knowledge, since it is obvious that no aesthetic philosophy is based on a comprehensive experience of artistic facts. And on the other hand, no-one can deny that the art critic each day discovering new sets of values, continually obliges aesthetic philosophy to modify and broaden the boundaries of its own systems. And so it seems to be proved that art criticism is the specific technique by means of which aesthetics continually widens its own bases of experience and carries out its own development, which naturally consists of criticising and transcending its own definitions.

Can this mutual "completion" of aesthetics and criticism be said to hold good for the whole field of aesthetics, that is to say in the sphere of a complete analysis of forms and their values, or only the sphere of forms and values which are first admitted to have a specific "artistic" character? The reply to this question implies a revision of the very conception of "art" and its limits. Without going into this general problem I will just point out that figurative art is undoubtedly bound up with visual experience, and more precisely represents a moment of major "activity" of this experience: and so it is permissible to wonder whether all visual experience does not contain in some degree or other a character of activity and to what extent this activity can be identified with the "excution" which is the specific character of all artistic activity. Which amounts to the same thing as to ask whether the specific techniques of art can be accepted as the "technique" proper to visual experience. Modern art criticism has made an important contribution to the solution of this problem :-

I) By seeking every possible relation between art and social life, and by recognizing an artistic interest and character in activities hitherto considered purely practical or economic.

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2) By extending its investigations and research for concrete artistic "values" not only to epochs and cultures formerly considered devoid of artistic interest and studied only from an ethnological, anthropological, or archeological point of view, but also to every manifestation of figurative representation.

3) By identifying more and more closely "figurative representation" - a product of execution - with "vision" - pure perception of the Real, that is to say admitting in every act of "vision" a processus or technique bound up with that of figurative representation. In this way art criticism tends to do away with the "concept" of art in "phenomenology" or in the concrete historicity of art itself : when this processus reaches its full development the theoretical distinction of "aesthetics" and "art criticism" will probably disappear, and it will no longer be possible to consider "aesthetics" as a separate category in the domain of philosophy considered as the theory of operative processes of the human mind.