

CREATIVE JUDGEMENT IN MODERN ART CRITICISM

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The maze of aesthetic theories arising in Europe since Hegel erected in his AESTHETIK the most comprehensive system hitherto and a temple to this subject, is and exact image of the ever changing, confusing and radically revolutionised aspect which we can follow in the development of the arts during the last hundred years, a development which reached its phase of extremism fifty years ago / to be exact in 1909/, and its phase of chaos and the didintegration of form since the middle of this century. There is no serious study of aesthetics which does not possess visible or hidden ties connecting it with Hegel's superhuman effort, either accepting or repudiating it, developing its ideas as a whole or parts of it and inevitably so because in itself it is to be seen as an encyclopedic and critical condensation of all the theories on art in existence up to his own time. There is nothing new or particularly surprising in this statement, even if we include, apart from obvious examples such as the aestherics of Benedetto Croce or Eduard V. Hartmann or George Santayana, those of Spengler or of Arnold Toynbee and André Malraux which are all closely connected with Hegelian thought. And even that of Martin Heidegger. It was this oracular thinker who pointing to the weighty remark contained in Hegel's VORLESUNGEN UBER DIE AESTHETIK:

" But we have no longer the absolute need to give expression to content in the form of art. As far as its highest realisation is concerned, art is for us a thing of the past," added significantly: " It has not yet been decided whether Hegel's sentence is right."

Today after the most violent and intense development in the entire history of art we see that what has been attacked and destroyed in aesthetic appreciation during the last five decades is not only the tradition of five centuries including the Greek stylistic tenets from the 5th century B.C. which are at its roots, but also the whole system of thought, philosophical, religious and scientific, feeding it as an alma mater. And as we are in the midst of this vehement process and in fact, in its most bewildered state with no way out, we may endorse Heidegger's statement that the decision on Hegel's statement cannot be taken for a long time yet. Our concern here is whether such a process could possibly be dealt with in art criticism and aesthetics with the help of a notion which seems to belong to a spiritual concept long since discarded, and which is the expression of an ideal which has consistently been repudiated and defeated in modern times: beauty. That for Hegel the subject and study of aesthetics was " the wide realm of beauty, i.e. beautiful art" and that in defining his science he called it philosophy of art, or more precisely philosophy of beautiful art" is not astonishing. But even a Heidegger cannot free himself from this

notion and has to struggle with it until he arrives at last at the conclusion that the history and substance of European art " can be comprehended neither through beauty by itself nor through the capacity of experience, provided the metaphysical concept does reach into its essence at all." It seems easier for an art critic and historian than for a philosopher to adopt this position of detachment from a fixed concept. A man such as Bernard Berenson who was beyond all suspicion of being too interested in the modern effort in art, for he was well respected for his conviction that European art attained in the Renaissance the highest possible level ever reached by a human culture, wrote about the scarcity with which the terms "beauty" and "beautiful" occur in his book on Aesthetics and History: "I have not avoided them deliberately, but art history is the history of art as an experience and is indifferent to questions of beauty". Since Zola coined the phrase "Le beau c'est le laid" which was accepted by Realists in art and literature, the notion of beauty has been discredited. From Beaudelaire's concept of satanic beauty - le beau satanique - / and it was he who said "Beauty is an enormous monster, terrifying, artless"/ to the Hegelian Surrealist André Breton's command: "Beauty will be convulsive/ i.e. it will be erotic/ or it will not be" only a step. It is a shade, a degree in the same anti-aesthetic attitude which led to the dictum: "Ugliness - the theme of our century". It is also a step from the aesthetic contrast of beautiful-ugly to the

psychological deeping of the true meaning of ugliness, ugliness as the gidden life of man with his passions, his instinct and his vices caught unawares in the latent stage, devoid of any mask and disguise, released by the artist in their true hideousness without a care for sublimation.

Let us now consider the reasons for the modern artist's enmity to the notion of beauty. In a statement made to Christian Zervos in 1935, Picasso said: " Academic training in beauty is a sham. We have been deceived, but so well deceived that we can scarcely get back even a shadow of the truth. The beauties of the Parthenon, Venuses, Nymphs, Narcissuses, are so many lies. Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon. When we love a woman we don't start measuring her limbs. We love with our desires - although everything has been to try and apply a canon even to love. The Parthenon is really only a farmyard over which someone put a roof; colonnades and sculptures were added because there were people in Athens who happened to be working, and wanted to express themselves. It's not what he artist does that counts, but what he is. Cézanne would never have interested me a bit if he had lived and thought like Jacques Emile Blanche, even if the apples he painted had been ten times as beautiful. What forces our interest is Cézanne's anxiety - that's Cézanne's lesson; the torment of van Gogh - that is the actual drama of the man. The rest is a sham."

Henry Moore, in a conversation with me in 1956 spoke of the one quality he found in all the artists he admires most - men like Masaccio, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Cézanne: " I mean a disturbing element, a distortion, giving evidence of a struggle of some sort. It is absent, of course, in all late Greek, Hellenistic art and in painters like Botticelli in his pre-Savonarola period, or in Raphael; although I find traces of it in the latter ... The classical style has a pleasing quality, a happy fixed finality is its aim - a resolved world ... I personally believe that all life is a conflict ... I think really that in great art, i.e. in the art I find great, this conflict is hidden, it is unsolved. Great art is not perfect ... All that is bursting with energy is disturbing - not perfect. It is the quality of life. The other is the quality of the ideal." When Klee speaking of the artist who has been used to represent things visible on earth which he enjoyed seeing or would have liked to see, said: "Now we reveal the relativity of visible things, and thereby express the belief that visible reality is merely an isolated phenomenon latently outnumbered by other realities ... ", he is not at all concerned with the notion of beauty, but with the notion of Being. Being and, analogously, art, too, he intuitively and as a genuine mystic considers to be a conjunction of contrasting elements, where each force requires an opposing force to achieve a stable, self-contained state - thus C.G. Jung, Heraclitus, Nicolas Cusanus / COINCIDENTIA OPPOSITORUM/.

Beauty is nowhere mentioned in his theoretical writings.

" A speeding automobile ... is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace" proclaimed Marinetti in 1909. "Destroy the cult of the past, the obsession of the antique ... rebel against the tyranny of the term 'harmony' and 'good taste'... Take and glorify the life of today ..." "Museums: cemeteries... Museums: public dormitories..." From here again to Jean Dubuffet's thesis of *l'art brut préféré aux arts culturels* / i.e. the art of the untrained, of the ignorant, of the idiot, of the mad man, the sexual graffiti on pavements, walls and the doors of public lavatories and only rarely, the art of unperverted children/ is only one step and a very logical one, as everything happens logically in the unfolding of modern art. Monsieur Michel Tapié the perverted subtleties of this sensationalist who represents a low denominator of human dignity and aspiration, his emulations of the primitive, his acted brutalism as the sure sign of the coming Messiah. "Until now, only the historically or geographically Barbarian arts have escaped the childish canons pickled under Pericles and brought out again with a thousand more or less grotesque affectations by those epochs of historic aberrations which, incredibly, have been catalogued under the name of *grand siècles*." Here than we have the other extreme: the cultural bully, the sworn enemy of any ideal conception, including that of beauty, - and in saying this I am painfully aware of the fact that we ourselves have none.

At this point of our reasoning we may understand fully Hegel's doubt whether art in its highest realization still corresponds to an absolute necessity of expression in our age. And what again we ask, can this art in its highest realization be but art as conceived by Heidegger, the very essence of which is defined by its metaphysical content? "Metaphysics is concerned with the recollection of the essence of Being and with the decision on the essence of truth". And Karl Jaspers says: "The urge of man's metaphysical thinking is towards art. His mind opens up to that primary state when art was meant in earnest and was not mere decoration, play, sensuousness but chiffrereading. Through all the formal analyses of its works, through all the unfolding of its world in the history of the mind, through the biography of its creators, he seeks contact with that something which perhaps he himself is not but which as Existence questioned, saw and shaped in the depth of Being that which he too is seeking".

"Because art is sensual and can be spiritual, a sharp cleft separates the world of art: one, an art which is artistry - however brilliant - in the splendour / or not / of the sensual; the other and art which is the language of the transcendental. all the glitter of the heart of the none but evident loses its significance before the visibleness of the invisible, the drive for life's fulfillment, before the drawing power of Being in eternity, the vitalisation of the spiritual, before the spiritualisation of the living ...". In this struggle for

the spiritualisation of art, "the sensual in the inevitable quality which must not escape; for only empty abstraction would remain. The spiritual is the essential; it must not be given up to the vital quality, to passion, to the sensual form in which it appears; all that would be left would be a reality without transparency on the one hand and intoxication on the other. Nothing is real without entering the sensual. But the sensual as such, as none but sensual, is void."

We realise that the term *aesthetics*, by virtue of its too close connotation with ideal beauty, the beautiful, is not only discredited but misleading. Hegel already seems to have felt this. We would, in fact, like to go back to the original significance of the term as used by the Greeks and by Kant as well, to *aio Ontikos*, which means belonging to the realm of sensual perception, referring to perception, but it is impossible, although the definition of 'modern art' would require it, for the very reason for which we hesitate to accept the notion of aesthetics. This definition elaborated on the basis of a critical study of the different isms of modern art, its theories and interpretations, reads as follows: "Modern art is primary cognition, the findings of which, often highly specialised and elaborated on an analytical basis, are organized into a new visual order. Linking up with a tradition of its own choice, of universal significance and without limitations in time and thus breaking with the chronological tradition hitherto acknowledged in art,

it strives for a synthesis in the work of the individual artist and through the mutual influence of its different trends upon one another; a many-faceted process moving towards a new unitary concept, a new artistic totality, in other words, a style. A style basically different from that of a classical cultura. We prefer to the term Aesthetics that of Philosophy of Art within the realm of which falls the theory of art, the relationship of technique and expression, the definition of art in its historical perspective, the classification and the interrelation of the arts, the psychology of artistic creation and the response of the public; the interpretation of art in connection with the "Zeitgeist", the life and meaning of changing forms and styles and last but not least the metyphysics of art. We prefer the term Philosophy of Art to that of Aesthetics of two reasons: Firstly because we are convinced that Aesthetics is not a science which can apply with impunity the methods and aims of the natural sciences, especially of physics, to the sphere of art, and secondly because we do not believe that there is and can be a rigorous borderline between aesthetics and philosophy in general. Such a separation is only a seeming one and based on practical considerations. In the deeper strata where the essence of art is referred to there is no separation. Again, when speaking of philosophy we do not mean the academic discipline of philosophy, the knowledge of past and present systems per se but their knowledge for use and application in the service of thinking, the searching for meaning and truth, the right and

original function of philosophy, which is " the pursuit of wisdom". This philosophy which has been proclaimed in our time as dead by both philosophers and scientists is entering a new phase of unforeseen renewal and widening of its scope. A majestic effort of this kind has been ventured upon recently and we find it for the first time, elaborated out of the concept of human greatness, in the leading philosophers and their schools /DIE VORTZUGENDEN GRÜNDER DER PHILOSOPHIE; AUS DEM URSPRUNG DENKENDE METAPHYSIKER, etc/ joined by the figures of Buddha, Confucius and Jesus /DIE MASSGEBENDEN MENSCHEN/, by the philosophers in poetry / The Greek tragic poets, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Hölderlin, Dostoyevsky/, in research, /Kepler, Galilei, Darwin, van Baer, Einstein; Ranke, Burckhardt, Max Weber/; in politics /Machiavelli, Morris, Locke, Montesquieu, Burke, Tocqueville/; in the humanities / Cicero, Erasmus, Voltaire; Shaftesbury Vico, Hamann; Herder, Schiller, Humboldt; Bacon, Bayle, Schopenhauer, Heine/; in life's wisdom/ Epictetus, Boethius, Seneca, Epicurus, Lucretius; Montaigne/; in the practice of life / Echnaton, Asoka, Marcus Aurelius, Frederick the Great; Franciscus of Assisi, Hyppocrates, Paracelsus; in theology / Me-ti, Menzius; Paulus, Tertullian; Malebranche, Berkeley/; in the teaching of philosophy / Proclus, Scotus Erigena, Wolff, Erdmann/. We may add the philosophy of the men of art /Leonardo, Michelangelo, Dürer, Rembrandt, Goya, Kokoschka, Klee/ and of architectura/ Palladio, Villard de Honnecourt, Bernini, Loos, Le Corbusier/. Our age is the first in history to re-

veal in its concent of philosophy, art and history, a universality never before dreamed of. In view of this fact, can aesthetics still be allowed to draw narrow and pedantic borderlines, in an attempt to copy the highly diverse specialisation in the exact sciences which is necessitated by diametrically opposed aims and methods, and undertaking which deprives both philosophy in its general concept and aesthetics in its specialised one of its very life-blood. The two phases in the history of modern aesthetics in which it was seen firstly as a special branch of philosophy and thereafter as a science must now be followed by a third phase in which the thorough methodology, the concern for form and style in art, for the application of the sciences of sociology, psychology, statistics, archeology, anthropology, ethnology and history to aesthetics itself, i.e. the analytical aspect, will be completed by the humanist aspect and the metaphysical approach which reinstates man as a totality far richer, far deeper, far more powerful than all his rationality.

In this connection it might be said of the relationship between aesthetics and art criticism that in whatever may we define these provinces of knowledge, we must realize that no critical discrimination, judgment, assessment of values, description or interpretation is possible without involving latent doctrines of aesthetics and of art history with all the specialized sciences involved which nowadays claim to deepen its aspects. The history of aesthetics is in fact to

a great extent the history of art criticism - the term aesthetics coming into the picture relatively late / A. Baumgarten, 1750/, Lionello Venturi entitled his book on the subject History of Art Criticism although it is to at least as great an extent a history of aesthetics. He approached his theme as a philosopher rather than as a critic the emphasis being on the philosophy of art. In the same volume Mr. Venturi pleaded for unity to avoid anarchy, the unity of art history, art criticism and aesthetics. "Recently an authoritative voice in France has insisted upon the differentiation of the three principles," he wrote. "The history of art should present works of art - all the works of art - without judging them, without commenting upon them, with the richest possible documentation of the facts. Art criticism should judge works of art in conformity with the aesthetic feeling of the critic. Aesthetics should formulate the definition of art in its universal meaning. "When speaking about the Method and Terminology of Art Criticism in 1957, Mr. Venturi expressed his conviction that a properly prepared vocabulary would contribute to its clarification. He stressed the fact that an art term can only be understood historically; after its original meaning has been determined, the evolution of that meaning as a result of changing ideas must be traced right up to the present. Unity of art history and art criticism! In a similar spirit a study was published not long ago in which the unity of aesthetics and art criticism was proclaimed. But alas! Aesthetics is therein understood as "that branch of philosophy whose function it is

to investigate what is meant to be asserted when we write or talk correctly about beauty. It is concerned logically to elucidate the notion of beauty as the distinguishing feature of works of art and to propound the valid principles which underlie all aesthetic judgements." Here is the devil beauty again, i.e. beauty in art conceived as a classic dogma. As though during the past 50 years the total switch over in taste and style had not taken place at all, from the dominating role played by the Renaissance in Italian art and the Periclean up to the Hellenistic style in Greek art, and what later was based on them / including Academism/, to everything in world art except these. It is a truism to say that a critic has to deal with contemporary art. If he had not, he would be an art historian or a historian on culture or a philosopher or just a dilettante and not a critic. But how can a critic today believe that he will be able to assess the earthquake in our artistic traditions with the help of this specific and antiquated notion of beauty? In a time in which the non-art quality of art has been solemnly proclaimed/ Dadaism, Surrealism/, when all notions of traditional technique, of composition, of the concept of the work of art and its function have been shaken, when the figural has been supplanted by the abstract, the constructive element by chance and accident, the brush by the drip and the splash, the paint by Polyfilla, the cellulose adhesive filler and bod, by plaster, sand, sackcloth, wood, bits and pieces of rubbish, by wire etc. i.e. by the waste

products of our civilization; volume in sculpture by linear writing in space or by the inclosure of architectural elements, modelling or carving by drilling and welding the volume by contour and colour; when technique stands in the foreground and "the thing itself" is forgotten or neglected; in such a stage of development as that in which our art finds itself now, of what use can the ideal notion of beauty, as it was established in classic art be to us? This fact is in itself a phenomenological problem of the first order which makes not only an aesthetic judgement based on traditional notions obsolete but renders any aesthetic judgement, which is not based on such notions, impossible. What remains is at its best a new experience, an undefinable sensation, a query.

In former times the critic was critical but he has stopped short of valuation long ago. He cannot keep pace with the violent and quick changes and plays safe by accepting everything. Far removed is the time when critics barred the way to "development and progress" in art. There are now no martyrs and saints of modern art such as van Gogh and Gauguin and Cézanne; the public no longer storm the art galleries in protest; they do not attack the works; they have become apathetic and accept the changes as if defeated by fate. The artist stands today like a film star in the searchlight of public admiration, or he is as safe as a pensioner as a teacher of art. What is left is the passive acceptance by public and critic of every whim and antic which comes along. What is left

is the passive acceptance by public and critic of every whim and antic which comes along. What is left are the speculations of a flourishing art dealer's business. But note- there are some artists who, bewildered by this most recent development, look for something more constant to hold on to. Who can give it to them? The critic, the art historian, the aesthetician? I allude to the ethical, to the creative side, to the enlightening role of the critic, the art historian, the aesthetician in the present phase of development. I ask you to consider for a moment the problem of the low standard of erudition prevalent among the young artists of today/ in comparison to that of a Leonardo, a Delacroix, a van Gogh, a Klee, a Kokoschka. One day I mentioned to a young and already successful painter the Chinese sentence "When painting has reached divinity there is an end of the matter", and noticing his interest, I spoke to him about the traditional canon of Chinese art, the treatise Chieh-Tzu-Yüan-Hua-Chuan in which not only all things visible are depicted as examples but wherein also man's attitude to nature was fixed and his love of creation, his philosophy of life, the Tao defined. The painter grew thoughtful and he said: "Why do you not write such a canon for us; isn't it your duty? The Gothic time had one, the Baroque time had one, we have none. There are thousands of artists nowadays who can do a lot but they have no hook to hang their craft on. If we could only get a mental image of ourselves, we could pull ourselves up by our own shoe - strings. But no. The painter rushes into his corner and comes back bleeding and then he rushes into another corner and that is

that. Then he says: See how I have wounded myself, it looks very decorative! What we need is an imaginative structure which the theoretician can share with the artist now in a closer manner than ever before. Once upon a time the painter did something and then the theoretician came and proclaimed: this means and this means that. Now the relationship is more instantaneous ...". You see what I am aiming at. It is perhaps the failure of our profession not to recognize where the true task lies.

There is a Cubist Aesthetics, there is a Futurist Aesthetics, an Expressionist, a Purist, a Dadaist, a Surrealist, a Realist, a Fauvist, a Symbolist, an Abstract, many Abstract Aesthetics. Is there in it all something a critic can use in the creative way suggested above? No. Something more is needed for that, something wider and deeper. The whole present development can be seen as an atomism of aesthetics in the same sense as we speak of an atomism in philosophy and of course in science. For the atomic method forms the basis of nearly all exact analysis. As cognition of reality atomism is a shortsighted method. For the concept of the atoms one no longer sees the final shapes of life, for the multiplicity of objects one can no longer see reality, for all isms and their theories one can no longer recognize what art is. But there is a view-point beyond these specialized and fragmentary ways of approach, a view-point in which they are all united, in which they all receive and conserve their true meaning, the meaning which we call the philosophy of art in

its deeper sense. And here again beauty can play its part not as an historically established dogma but as a necessary corrective of the unbalanced, depressive and nihilistic attitudes of today, be it the concept of life's absurdity or that of Angst, the destructive urge, the regression to Primitivism or the Gospel of Uglines: Beauty as nostalgia out of our hell, the enigma of perfection, in the sense of Kant's transcendent beauty or as the prophetic woman spoke to Socrates of man in search of beauty in the Symposium: He will begin "with the love of beautiful things and continuously ascending, as though by steps, for the sake of beauty itself, from one beautiful body to two and from two to all and from beautiful bodies to beautiful Morals and from beautiful Morals to beautiful Sciences finally to that Science which is nothing less than the Science of pure Beauty, wherein the true essence of Beauty is learnt. Therein my dear Socrates, if anywhere, should life be lived: in the contemplation of Beauty's self."

Perhaps the search for beauty calls for a force great enough to recognize a higher and deeper meaning in and behind our time's obscurities of existence, the tragic conflicts and hateful abysses. What is at stake, we repeat, is not an ideal but a force which refines and elevates. For only he who loves can see beauty. And only he who loves can truly create. Braque when asked about the problem of beauty said to me during a conversation in the Summer of 1952: " There is first

the question of whether beauty is a problem. It is not because there are no such fixed data. They are misleading. There is no solution for life - but there is a perpetual process of adaptation. I have replaced the notion of the eternal by the idea of the perpetual. The question of beauty is a question of achieving harmony. And harmony is nothingness for the intellect where words have no value. It is a state of grace or of mystic illumination. In such a state one comprehends beauty."

Our present difficulties make me believe more than ever that the personal contact with the artist is of the utmost importance for the critic and the aesthetician, both in order to learn and to give. What the writer on art has to give is the knowledge of philosophy, of literature, music, of religious concepts, aesthetics, of art history, in one word, of the history of human culture the different aspects of which are moulded by that one great experience which is man's psyche. He will use the history of art not as an academic discipline but as the source and background of contemporary creativeness - that is to say, in reverse: History seen not from the earliest date but from today backwards, constructive in appreciation, and vital. He will take aesthetics as the permanent attempt of man to grasp the significance and the inner meaning of art as one way leading towards the comprehension of life; he will, by confronting the past with the present, spin the thread which connects the past with the future.

He will thus promote that impetus which dominates any artist worth the name and any person of integrity: The desire to ennoble and embellish human existence, and to hand it with dignity to the coming generation as the most precious gift bestowed upon us.

Barely had I developed those ideas when there appeared on the scene - obeying the rule of fast and perpetual change - the serene and gaily coloured pictures of the Hard-Edge school as reflected in the latest American and English Op-Art, and the highly coloured objects of plastic material representing the latest trend of sculpture. The scene has changed from the frivolous and banal Pop-Art to publicity minded Op-Art leaving far behind the depressive and nihilist inclinations of previous years. What they represent is not Beauty in Kant's transcendental or Plato's metaphysical concept - this is art in the direct service of business and industry. It is craftsmanship as such, applied art. It seems to me now that the early revolution in modern art has finally led to the annihilation of art as expression, it has remained a communication all right, but a communication not of human but of commercial values.

For the historically minded and concerned art critic there remains the obligation to draw a sharp and determined line here between something which is art in the meaning of age-old tradition and what has become of it under the impact of industrialisation when it is still erroneously called art.