CALLIGRAPHY: ART, CRAFT, PERFORMANCE

INTRODUCTION

1. *Ars* and *tékhné*

Once "art" in the sense of "creative art" and art in the sense of "technique" were referred to by the same ancient Greek word *Tékhné* . The Latin word *ars* referred to a similar concept. In China and Japan, too, there were terms that correspond to craft and skill; *gei* or *waza.* Not surprisingly these terms were and are not only equivocal but also when retrospectively examined they actually include seemingly contradictory elements : they refer both to technology of science , and the technique of fine art. As is well known *tékhné* meant not only the skill of carpenters and tailors but also "*tékhné* of *mimesis*", the artistic *poiesis.* Modern aestheticians explained this by the supposed immaturity of the Greek concept of Art, but it can also be argued that what was not established and was absent was the concept of technique, in the narrow, modern sense.

Tékhné meant, roughly , artisanship, the bodily skill which was often not verbalized. The Latin term *ars* was used in even wider sense in the Middle Ages when it covered not only the work of artists and artisans, but also, the forms, *morphe*, of all the human acts, whether or not they resulted in new objects of

intrinsic value. For example, *ars moriendi* referred to the manners governing the way a person should make farewells to his families and friends on his death bed. This *ars* does not necessarily aims to achieve particular ends but tries to control his own way of doing something and organize his way of life in general.

In ancient China there were the Six-Arts, which every nobleman was supposed to master to become a man of culture. They were: the arts of calligraphy, archery, driving (coaches), arithmetic, music and manners. Mastering these arts had a moral significance, which became particularly important in a later period (when Confucianism became the dominant ethics), when it transformed into the Five -Teachings. Practicing these arts became then an important part of spiritual training. In this way a highly "aesthetic" sort of "private' morality, based on the teachings of Buddhism and Taoism, emerged, and especially in Japan began to permeate all cultural and social life.

Training of one's self through regulating one's own acts needs a high degree of control over one's body, even if these acts are not meant to produce any effects outside the body. The formalization and stylization of acts is connected to bodily practice and habits, and this again pertains to the control of inner feelings and thus to spiritual training. The Eastern concept of Way (Tao) is often compared to concepts of modern Western aesthetics but a more accurate comparison is with the aesthetics of *ars*. In both cases of *Tao* and *Ars* spiritual self control is the aim and any of "work of art is" that emerges is, as it were, a by-product. The purpose is of course to "succeed', but what counts is not so much the success as the way in which it is achieved. "Way" is a concept of wide application , in fact in principle applicable to all human activities from daily life to government of a state. Knowing "Way" is supposed to enable one to achieve whatever one aims at without disturbance, effortlessly and perfectly. Various rules that are usually part of arts based one the concept of "way" should be seen as means

to achieve that special spiritual stage needed for effortless success.

By contrast the modern Western aesthetics was based on the concept of Art and its autonomy. In the Romantic Period Art was distinguished, sometimes even opposed to, Life, being viewed the last fortress of human freedom against the remorseless progress of industrial society. If you remember how the Western aesthetics emerged, it is not surprising that it was concerned with what art is not perhaps more than with what art is. The central objects of interest of Aesthetics were defined sometimes in terms of special aesthetic attitudes such as "disinterestedness", sometimes in terms of concepts of "appearance", or "imagination", but always as something special, something that involves "changing the gear" used in ordinary life.

Though it is an fascinating topic, today I have no time to talk about this. Only I would like to stress that when we are comparing some aspects of different cultures, for example, the relationship between art and morality, for example when we try to view the aesthetics of the Way as a counterpart of the aesthetics of Art, the very fact that this does not work is in important ways itself revealing. In order to compare, for example Way and Art we have to put them side by side on the same plane to see the difference. But we face the problem that the very concept of aesthetics itself seems, in the eye of one culture, to be lacking in the other; while in this latter culture 'theoretical understanding' as such is regarded subordinate to practical understanding. And this is happening in an area in which the interrelation of theory and practice is particularly subtle and difficult to describe: for aesthetics is above all a theory of certain practices.

Two aesthetics

Let us now change our viewpoint to that of the appreciators. Aesthetic response can involve two different aspects, 'how beautiful it is!' or 'what a wonderful thing!', and 'how well it is done!', that is, appreciation not merely of a given object but also of the performance that produced it. Sometime we admire the object for its inherent qualities, regardless of the process of production or the intended purpose. This is the characteristic response to objects of admiration and wonder in nature , but is also applied to art works like pictures in a gallery. On the other hand it is often the case that what we are 'really' appreciating is not - or is not exclusively - a perceptual object with its attendant aesthetic qualities , but the performance involved in its creation. Our knowledge and understanding of the conventions of the art form, of the medium and tools the artist used, of what sort of problems he had to solve etc. affects in a fundamental way the aesthetic experience itself. Unless one knows the rules of Chess, unless in fact hone has some experience of this game, one cannot appreciate the "beauty" of sacrificing Queen in order to remove opponent's pawn so that final Check-mate will follow. Somebody who "understands" more, can appreciate more of the performance. Or rather, in the case of performance to understand means to appreciate. But this is a special kind of understanding, in order to understand, one has to have certain experience oneself. Of course you can appreciate Bunin's Chopin, even if you have never heard of the pianist's name, and even if you have never played the piano, but you get different kind of appreciation if you have played the same Etude yourself, or even another piece of Chopin, or perhaps not Chopin but Bach, or in the least case not the piano but the violin. The extent one appreciates the performance is not necessarily determined by the degree to which one has undergone the same or a similar experience. Even if you have had played the particular work of Chopin yourself, still you may fail to appreciate its particular

virtues. And even someone else, who has less experience of Chopin's music may appreciate the performance better than you. We do not know everything that helps one's appreciation. Even so, there is something that may be called the appreciation of connoisseur, in which appreciation itself is a kind of performance. Those who can appreciate in this way often speak of a performance not merely as beautiful or ugly, graceful or charmless, but as apt or inappropriate, right or mistaken, inspired or mechanical. In such appreciation attention is paid to elements of the art work judged in terms of certain standard or ideal which those who appreciate also share. - in this instance concerning, perhaps, a tradition of interpretation. The appreciator can "read" the performer's disposition' or 'spiritual input' because (to some extent) it can be understood by those who share the artist's skill.

This kind of appreciation of 'performance' played a central role in traditional Japanese aesthetics. In the West it is found especially in appreciation of performing arts. As a theory it was intimately related to the Taoist and Zen Buddhist concept of 'the Way' (Tao). In China this concept extends to practically every kind of human performance, but in Muromachi Japan it acquired a predominantly aesthetic meaning. All the arts practised at that time were called Ways: the Way of *waka* poetry [kado], the Way of the tea ceremony [sado], the Way of flower arrangement [kado], the Way of calligraphy [shodo] and the way of art in general [Geido].I want to emphasize that one of the most frequently misunderstood aspects of Japanese arts, especially of the traditional arts, is closely connected with its 'performing' character. It concerns what is often referred to as the 'spirituality' of the art in question. The truth is that such 'spiritual' qualities are not typically, as in Western art, ' symbolic', inherent in the art object itself, but are held to be involved in the act of artistic creation. The

audience tries to experience the artist's spirituality by identifying themselves with the artist-performer rather than by concentrating on any feeling represented or symbolized in the actual work itself. For example, as I will show later, Calligraphy is appreciated by emphasizing the spiritual disposition of the person who wrote it, rather than an abstract art.

As may be already clear, I use here the words 'performance' or 'performing', of course, in a particular defined sense, somewhat distinct from the sense implied in the term 'performing arts' , though the two meanings are naturally related. Thus composing music is just as much a 'performance' as playing it. In the former case , however, the creative process , with its rules and constraints , is basically 'hidden' from the typical music lover, while in the latter it is public, in that the members of the audience have access to the score and could, in principle, perform 'the same' music themselves. Such open and public nature of the creative process on the one hand and connoisseurship and esotelic nature of appreciation on the other is particularly notable in many Japanese arts of the Middle Ages.

(I would like to add that this 'appreciation of performance' in the culture of Medieval Japan can even be found in relation to the beauties of nature - a fact that may appear paradoxical given that enjoyment of nature, as suggested above, is usually taken as a paradigm of appreciation of objects in and for themselves. Implicit in this view, however, is the assumption that natural objects, unlike those made by man, cannot involve any intention, and thus cannot be considered apt, proper or out of place. Such an assumption is natural in a secular society in which the idea of a non-human purpose in the natural order is discredited. But we should not find it surprising that cultures in which the primacy of 'fact' over 'value' was much less accepted would judge natural phenomena according to norms, that

is to say, according to certain ideals, which are also applied to human creations and according to that norm one may find them on occasion inadequate or inappropriate.

Viewed in this way nature does not always perform as well as it should. According to the traditional Japanese aesthetics it is "improper" for rain to start falling suddenly just when cherry blossoms are going to bloom. In spring rain should fall rather lightly, like silk. A nightingale should not show itself, it should be known only by its singing. There are many such traditional rules about what is "proper in nature". Of course "proper" in such cases is almost the same as "usual", though not by no means everything that was usual was considered "proper".)

Skills and knowing how

What I have been saying is related to Gilbert Ryle's well known distinction between "knowing that" and "Knowing how". Ryle argued that knowledge of how to ride a bicycle can be taught and leaned and even "understand". But this knowledge needs real experience and description by means of rules and causal relationship will not suffice. To ride a bicycle well requires a certain kind of "cleverness", which is different from that required to solve a mathematics problem. Now the point is, *the aim of a skillful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them.* The principle by which the cyclist keeps his balance is not generally known. The rule unconsciously observed by the cyclist is something like this. "When he starts falling to the right he turns the saddle bars to the right, so that the course of the bicycles is deflected along a curve towards the right. This results in a centrifugal force pushing the cyclist to the left and offset the gravitational force dragging him down to the right. This maneuver presently throws the cyclist out of balance to the left which the counteracts by turning the handlebars to the left. A simple analysis shows that for a given angle of a balance the curvature

of each winding is inversely proportional to the square of the speed at which the cyclist is proceeding."

But this detailed analysis does not tell how to ride a bicycle. If you would like to learn how to ride a bicycle, you would rather ask somebody who does well to show you how to do, and perhaps to help yourself to do that so that you can get the feeling through your own experience. It is true however, detailed analysis and principles will help you to ride better and correct the unnecessary energy if perhaps you are going to participate in a cycling race, or you are learning more complicated skill than just riding bicycles but more acrobatic show in a circus. If you are learning how to turn in ballet, it is better to know that it is a turn, or a particular pas, rather than just been shown the example without explanation. Concepts do help one to perform them.

Rules in art can be useful but they do not determine the practice of an art. They are helpful essentially to those who already know how to apply them. They are maxims, which can serve as guides to an art only if they can be integrated into the practical knowledge of the art. They cannot 'replace' that knowledge.

The fact that an account of a skill cannot be given in terms of particulars and that something always remains unexplained may lead to serious difficulties in judging whether or not a skillful performance is a genuine work of art. Non experts may not distinguish a work of Rembrandt from that of a skillful imitator. There are well known cases even of experts, recognizing "the master's touch" in works that turned out to have been forgeries. The history of musical performance knows a number of controversies, concerning the objective existence of certain widely discussed qualities, like " touch" in piano playing for instance. There is always a danger of our explaining away genuine practices only because we cannot understand and explain them in terms of our hitherto accepted framework. Still even in

art , just as in science or technology the method of criticism is indispensable if we wanted to 'improve', not necessarily in the sense of "progress", but even just to develop our abilities. Without constant criticism there cannot be any 'advancement of knowledge'. Analysis remains also an indispensable weapon against superstition and specious practices not only in science but also in art.

An art which cannot be specified in detail cannot be transmitted by prescription, hence no prescription for it can exist. It can be passed on from master to apprentice only by personal example. This restricts the range of diffusion to that of 'personal' contacts. We know that craftsmanship survived in Middle ages in just this way, in the form of secret skills passed on within guilds, sects or families of craftsmen, actors etc. The diffusion of crafts from one country to another can often be traced to the migration of groups of craftsmen. Even in Science, while the articulated 'contents' of science ("knowledge that") are successfully taught all over the world in thousands of schools and universities, the much less "articulable" art of scientific research (how to do science) is taught in a way which is closer to the practices of medieval craftsmen. Similar considerations apply to many other spheres, like law or politics. In both cases it is easy to gain access to the written body of laws, constitutions of other counties and to copy the "articulated" form or organization of institutions like courts, juries, parliaments etc. What is much harder is to adopt the many salient habits and even states of mind associated with the actual legal or political practice of other cultures.

A case in point is the Japanese parliamentary system, which though closely modeled on Western ones, works in a very different way, involving many aspects of politics quite alien to the liberal and democratic traditions on which it is based.

From the above discussion it seems to follow that an art which has fallen into disuse for the period of a generation is most likely altogether lost. One can only note the striking failure, despite the use of modern technology to reproduce a single violin of the kind made by Stradivarius as matter of routine 200 years ago. Another example are the so called "living treasures" in Japan: craftsmen possessing unique skills, some of which, like the skill of making a Urushi lacquer-cup are now about to become extinct.

To learn by example means, inevitably, to submit to authority. You follow your master because you trust his manner of doing things even when you cannot analyze and account fully for its effectiveness. By watching the master and emulating his efforts, the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself. This is called "stealing a craft" , since what the master tells you what he is doing may not be necessarily what he is really doing. In other words, ultimate authority of master lies in what he does, not in what he says he is doing. These hidden rules can be assimilated only by a person who surrenders himself to that extent 'uncritically' to the imitation of another. A society which wants to preserve a body of 'personal knowledge' must submit to tradition.

To the extent that we are unable to formulate precisely how we act in the light of 'unspecifiable knowledge' we must acknowledge that we can rely only on either our own judgement or on the authority of a personal example, as a carrier of a tradition. And whether we are doing something with our own body, or using some tools, there is always an aspect which we are unable to formulate structurally and which we feel is "within us" and not in the object that we trying to describe. Once we concentrate our attention to our own throat when singing, the act of singing becomes the object of our consciousness and we

may describe it to some extent. But we cannot completely specify how we do the singing. Whenever we attempt this something is lost when we focus our attention on it we cannot be fully aware of what our own body does. As is often pointed out, a centipede walks paying attention to what it is doing: this activity which seems very complex to a human observer is simplicity itself to the worm. To quote Michael Polanyi: we know more than we can say.

Technology and the paradox of body-mind dualism

Europe in the latter half of the 18th saw the industrial revolution : the invention of auto-spinning machines and the steam engine brought about the beginning of industry. As workers' skills was surpassed by the efficiency of machines a lot of unskilled labor became needed instead. On the other hand a class of "mind workers", of engineers and managers who plan and organize the work emerged. It was as if the Cartesian split of mind and body, was reflected here as the split of purpose from process, plan from execution, ideas and concept from their realization. Technology was a name for the 'intellectual', mind-like aspect of labour, and the method of eliminating the limits and restrictions of body in order to maximize the control of purpose and plan over labour.

Technology is one of the key concept of the modern period. It is not only because modern people control and conquer technologically the environment and approach various problems technically and solve them technologically. Social problems, too, are approached and dealt with, by engineering and planning. Today it is not at all sure that Nature or Beauty are cab really be free of technology.

The machine was invented in order to replace the work of

the human body. Hence there is something body-like in a machine: in it multiple functions of our body are made visible, and thus it helps us to objectify our own body. We can see the working of the human body in more specified, more conscious way. Once we make a robot that can ride a bicycle, we can probably see better what is involved in riding a bicycle.

Technique is a form of doing something but that is not enough to define it. Even if an act lead to a realization of certain aim and even if a causal relationship between the act and the attainment of the aim were established it would not be enough to speak of a technique. Only when we look back and analyze the process, confirm the causal relationship and formulate it so that the sequence act-attainment of aim can be reproduced, we can speak of a technique. The analysis of and the reflection on the act should to be done rationally, and the pattern of the act must be expressed conceptually, or, in a spacially viewable flowchart. The pattern of the act will be repeatedly used for realization of a definite purpose. As long as it remains in the realm of body, it is not technique. It must be brought in to the realm of mind and then become repeatable by machine. In this sense machine is more similar to mind rather than body.

We might define technology as a method of doing something, as the form of an act, as means to achieve certain ends. Each of these three terms: ends, means and act needs a closer examination.

1. First, there has to be a certain well-defined end. Unless the end is clearly, unambiguously defined, one cannot talk about means. The end cannot be just desire or wish, or an abstract ideal, but must be a concrete and well defined goal such that one can have a strategy or a plan to realize it. Thus technology starts already in the stage of formulating what is needed to realize an aim and in the stage of planning.

2. Second, the means must be directly and unmistakably understood. For one thing the means must be subordinated to the ends. That is to say, the means themselves cannot become ends nor the choice of means cannot change the ends for reasons of convenience or ease of attainment. Also the means must be connected to the ends via a causal relationship. That is to say, even if the desired aim is attained, if one cannot explain how it was done and with what sort of materials, one cannot speak of technology. Of course it usually not necessary to describe each step in practice, but in principle one must be able to make every step explicit and all the steps must be necessarily connected by a causal chain. This includes even those processes which seem trivial and do not effective difference, for example the particular choice of a tool to put in the nails etc. If in principle such a logically connected chain of steps cannot be constructed, then the procedure should be called magic and not technology.

3. Thirdly the notion of a formulated act as the basis of technique and technology, requires not only that the outward form of the act be defined, but also that each act must belong to a certain generalized type: a technique must be repeatable and applicable with suitable modifications, in a variety of situations. This is why technique must be taught and conveyed systematically, and must needs a conceptual scheme. In other words, it must be conveyed by word or in another spacially observable way, e.g. by a flow chart. If something remains logically unstatable, it means that this something remains within a particular person, i.e. within body. Thus the importance of body being replaced by machine, lies in the fact that machine is separated from body. Thanks to the fact that machine became independent from body, it could be improved, replaced by a more efficient one, transferred to different environments and different cultures, etc. Machine originated as

a substitute for body, but it was a case of "over-substitution", requiring much more than body does, just as numbers serve not only as substitutes for things, but go further by creating a world of meaning, where things are too imprecise.
This is the main point of civilization and technology. Body remains, as it were, not 'civilized' completely. Something dark and unmanageable and menacing comes from body.

What, then, was lost in the process of advancement of technology and civilization? *Ars* has been lost. Originally *ars* shared several characteristics with technique : repeatability, usefulness, conceivability, improvability, and it could serve as norm. Just as technique, *Ars* functioned as means to ends, and was based on the use of critical judgment in identifying its goals and measuring the relevance of itself as means in regard to the desired end.

But there were also differences. The biggest one came from the characteristics of body which contrast those of machine. Unlike machine, body allows room for unpredictability, uniqueness and uncertainty.

Thus restrospectively Ars can be said to have had three separable aspects:

(1) an aspect which could transform into technique, which may be called **skill or craft, that** defines and specifies the purpose, through rationalizing the process of pursuit of efficiency of act.

(2) **The aspect of ceremony**, or **ritual** which mainly serves

to establish self-control organizing the "darker side" of our sub-consciousness, and particularly visible in connection with acts involving strong emotions or direct bodily experience, such as marriage, funerals, or eating etc.

(3) Another, "middle ground" aspect is **manner** which not only produce self control inside but also makes certain effect outside. It serves of course means to some ends, but as for efficiency is concerned its nature is opposite to the case of technique. Table manners, for example, do aim at enhancing the enjoyment of the taste of food, but they prolong the process of satisfaction of pleasure and do not aim at the fastest way to achieving it.

Indeed these three aspects of *ars* have lost their central role in culture after the industrial revolution, and it seems that the birth of Art helped this process. Modern people respect fine arts but have lost respect for fine manners. Art has monopolized the world of Beauty and Appearance. Thus the beauty of daily life declined with the industrial revolution, which brought us the many benefits of technology. Art had to be liberated from the 'mere technique" and mere efficiency in order to become the guardian of human freedom, human emotion, idea, or dream or, imagination , un-governed by the control of any other human activity, especially of the inhuman 'deterministic' mechanical world. As the result, the overlap of art and craft, artistry and manners and the ceremonial element quickly became a part of an increasingly blurry history.

Once a clear distinction between art and craft became established, it was naturally emphasized that in art ends and means are not distinguished, that art is unrepeatable and unique, and that its process of creation is hidden and felt as an unexplainable gift or inspiration which comes from nowhere,

always as a surprise. This pushed the domain of art toward the subjective world, just as science and technology obtain a monopoly of the objective one.

Thus paradoxically art encouraged the "de-humanization" of civilization. Machine is something that obtains energy from outside the human body and contains in itself a system of automatic transformation of that input energy into "useful" output in the most efficient way. This automatization is important. The aim was, historically , to obtain greater power than could be derived from human labour but in such a way that the 'transformation' of this power should take place (ideally) without intervention of human labour. In this respect a sawing machine with a manual handle is closer to the ideal machine than more modern dentist's drill, since the latter needs more intervention of human skill. In the case of a machine what counts is not really where the energy comes from , but rather that the control system should be automatic.

In the case of human craft, human force is conveyed to the material, and the material counteracts this force. The tools not only convey the force to the material, but also receive the information from the material which results in our will and design changing. The machine overcomes the resistance of the material and sometimes even destroys the material. The machine changed the structure of human work separating the end from the means. The power of the machine realizes the ends as intended, but this means that it must work only for definite ends. Once a machine is made, the relationship between ends and means cannot be changed: the process of execution has been objectified and cannot be more than just a process.

The one-way transmission of force implies a distinction between something that exerts the force and something that receives it. Thus separation of the passive body and the active

mind became the essence of the dualism of Cartesian world, even though Descartes himself thought of the body as lying in between the passive and the active. It is interesting that both romanticism and classicism hailed the freedom of will. Classicism based on the philosophy of Enlightenment deprecated the 'passive' emotions and glorified reason which represented the 'active' freedom while the Romantics saw emotion as active power. In both ways of thinking we can recognize something of this one-sided transmission of force, for example "feeling" never changed the content of will in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and counter-action from the outside was not conveyed to will through emotion.

What I would like to emphasis is this ironical role that Art has played in this process. Art, though opposed to technique helped to establish the idea of the rule of technique, through the "division of labour" between rational technique and emotional art, scientific truth and aesthetic beauty , usefulness and art for art's sake, the real world and the world of imagination, etc. Indeed in the 18th century labour and leisure split the life of average people with one dominated by technique and the other by art (including its low and debased forms). Technique eliminated artisanship and skill, and art eliminated manner and ceremony. The typical 19th century aesthetics considered the expression of feeling as the main or even only task of Art. This was just another way of exertion of force: art telling you the feelings of a poet or an artist. The "Art for Art's sake movement" made Art very similar to technique, since it essentially just replaced reason with emotion. On the other hand when Art served the other aspects of life, in education, advertising or entertainment it became just technique.

This leads to an interesting new area of *autopoiesis*, a self-creating system, where the whole contrast between machine and living being, and the so-called mechanistic explanation and organic explanation are re-structured by renewing the aesthetic idea of organization. I hope we have another occasion to discuss this matter, but what I would like to empathize in today's talk is that it is our body that is our individual mind or spirit, and art and aesthetics that appreciate this body and its working can exist. As an example I would like to offer the traditional oriental art of calligraphy, in which one appreciates the transmission of human spirit into brush and paper, through a process in which everything: the artists body and mind, movement, materials and the art work form a single unified "body".

Illustration

1 There are several different attitudes which can be taken towards calligraphy, resulting in different appreciation: it can be viewed as a beautiful way of writing letters, as a kind of abstract art or as a special performing art.

2. How the process of creation is visible in a work of calligraphy.

3. How the "resistance of the medium and tools" can be measured in a work of calligraphy, particularly through the "force of Brush".

4. The "heart" or "spirit" of a calligrapher and its "imitation" in a work of calligraphy. What does the 'copying the heart' mean.