

ARS IN CRUDO — AN OUTLINE OF PROBLEMS

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By “ars in crudo” we shall understand all art in its primitive, raw state. This kind of art is still in the making, has not yet reached the maximum of its possibilities which are inherent in the foundations of style or type; it is an art in its initial stage, unlearned, taking its first steps in realisation. This art is alien to technical perfection. Its main characteristics are freshness, technical simplicity and directness in the sense of unskilfulness, lack of care that the work should match the canons of formal mastery.

As a model, “classical” case of art in crudo we may recognize, on the principle of Weberian ideal type, such in which the artist has no artistic education, does not make his living by his art, when he creates out of his own, profound and authentic need, when he does not imitate recognized art (“academic”, “fashionable” etc.), when the works he creates have at least the value of “freshness” (are not executed with academic, technical virtuosity), the aesthetic value of these products being naiveté (a specific, hard to define quality, which appears due to following the first impulse of creative inventiveness, and which has many varieties).

Hybrid cases are those in which is revealed a tendency to imitate official art, to display links with various artistic conventions from Renaissance on to twentieth-century avant-garde. This also includes the phenomenon of the amateur artists’ self-education, various ways of making money, their institutionalisation and the aspiration to achieve the status of recognized, “real” artists.

We are dealing with border-line cases when it is hard to pigeon-hole the artist or his works – here belong, for instance, self-thought artists of genius, the works of non-professional artists that are authentic and original but lack the quality of naiveté (e.g. some cases of psychotic art), on a high level of technical perfection (masterly), stylistically close to “academic” art.

It is possible to order the facts of artistic life in such a manner that they will make up a continuous line, from accidental products of everyday life (e.g. conference drawings) to masterpieces of great artists; in like manner, from accidental "artists" to thoroughly educated artists of great talent. Such a formulation would offer no sharp divisions, the differences being of only quantitative, not qualitative, nature (every work would display some naiveté, and some degree of technical skill).

It can be assumed that there are no connections between the several varieties of *ars in crudo*, that they are totally different phenomena. Instead of looking for what is commonly shared, one would have to deal separately with folklore, children's art, amateur art etc. One would then achieve methodological clarity and many difficulties could be avoided. Such a formulation, however, is characteristic of exact sciences, and not of aesthetics which seeks synthesis and generalizations.

Facts, however, justify the assumption that there exist artistic phenomena which are distinct from professional art, and yet close enough to one another, while sufficiently opposed to professionalism, which can be — at least hypothetically — treated as a whole : *ars in crudo*. Whereas the various factors that make this art similar to professional art are here different and fulfil different functions. E.g. different role is played by artistic education, still different by the fact of material gain, the institutions also differ, etc. This point of view shall be adopted in the present discussion.

The dominant feature of *ars in crudo* will be linked with the creative subject, and not with the artist as a real person living in a given time and place, in order to be able to include these cases in which one man may belong to different categories successively in the course of his life, or even simultaneously (e.g. an amateur becoming a professional, a professional in one field of art cultivating in an amateur way another branch, etc.).

In suggesting a typology we are employing widely used terms, but it must be borne in mind that in each of the types there may occur model, hybrid and border-line cases, and even — except for children's art — almost fully comparable with professional art.

1. Children's art is probably the least doubtful case of *ars in crudo*. The "causative subject" can be quite easily defined in its specificity determined by the stages of biological and psychic development, and so can the creative subject (the need for expression, attaching no importance to the product, great sensitivity

to newly distinguished and learned sensual qualities and linguistic structures, unrestrained creative imagination, etc.), then one can also speak of specific stylistic features of children's art, permeating it independently of the country and culture of origin. This art is not, in principle, subject to exterior influences or education (unskillful and excessive education destroys its directness, freshness and naiveté).

2. Naïve art, where the causative subject is an artistic individuality, the art develops out of individual, authentic need, the artist has no education. This kind of art is distinguished by individual style (where it differs from children's art), is independent of patterns (where it differs from amateur art), is not a direct continuation of tradition (where it differs from folk art). This type of art, as a model case of art in crudo, will be discussed further below.

3. Amateur art, performed by both educated and uneducated people, usually subject to multiple and strong influences of their cultural environment — therefore it does not fit the domain of naive art in the sense described above. This art is distinguished by its dependence on patterns imitated more or less consciously. It is "dependent" art, without its own, individual style and also, as a rule, lacking technical perfection. When individual style begins to emerge in this kind of art, it begins to move towards naive or academic art (depending on the degree of acquired technical skill).

4. Folk art, created mostly in connection with rural environment. Folk artists realize styles relayed from generation to generation — their art is therefore linked with local or regional tradition, is distinguished by "collective individuality", so to say. It approaches naive art when it gains separate, individual characteristics, or amateur art when it becomes dependent on academic models. It is uneducated art — naturally, in the sense in which professional artists are educated — it is an expression of collective imagination, and skills are acquired by watching the masters or doing one's apprenticeship with them. This art is an immense source of inspiration for professional artists, although quite often they go astray in doing so: they start to imitate, or even counterfeit, folk art for commercial purposes. Today, it seems, folk art is declining: it finds too many patrons, is economically exploited and subject to too many external influences. Folk artists begin to create works that are "liked", are in fashion and can be well sold; they become influenced by academic art, not necessarily

at its best. The professionals, on the other hand, begin to stylize folk art, radically changing its sense. Folk art moves from the authentic rural setting to museums and clubs, and to "showpiece" folk groups. Stylized folk art exceeds the category of art in crudo, but its vitality betokens the vitality of the still existing, authentic folk art.

5. The art of the mentally diseased is a very complex category, for it includes people who are professional artists, people who have not ceased to work creatively, naive artists and folk artist, amateurs; it also includes those whose creative talents have been liberated by their sickness. We are not going to name all possible cases, or all functions of that art : from the therapeutic function to the aesthetic one, through the possibility of diagnosing on the basis of its products. Psychotic art, especially that closely connected with the fact of falling sick, is usually full of nightmares and obsessions, unearthly and with a clear emotional mark, therefore suggesting the search for its symbolic meanings. Yet the mentally diseased person does not borrow from hackneyed symbols, spontaneously introducing his own code, his own camouflages, impenetrable for the viewer of his works. Is it possible to penetrate the inner world of the sick person hidden behind his paintings ? This is a case for psychology. We, on the other hand, are interested in the fact that these works also possess aesthetic values, are fresh and unique, authentic, are made by way of free expression, inner need which either makes the artist give up new ideas, draw sketches, abandon unfinished works – or else devote much time and patience to a single work. The realized forms, colours schemes, the world of visions, hallucinations or nightmares, are all quite unique. With its obsessive-ness, and often high technical skill, this art exceeds the category of naive art as we have characterized it.

6. The art of primitive peoples is an immense area of phenomena, which can be placed on one plane (this is evidenced by the studies of Levi-Strauss – and that art is also referred to by musicologists of semiological orientation). What is most striking here, can also be attributed to *ars in crudo* at large : close ties between the art and reality (physical, social, natural), its authenticity (nothing is invented, nothing is added for purely formal reasons). The peculiarity of this art is fulfilling non-aesthetic functions – religious, magical, cult (myths manifest the tendencies to overrule reality by means of magic) and also that it does not oppose professional art – it is simply the only kind of art, and all art, that these peoples have.

7. Archaic art may be included in *ars in crudo*, for in comparison with the more developed forms of art it gave rise to, it is raw, primitive, far from virtuoso aspirations. Its dominant feature is simplicity resulting from several sources : the impossibility to put together a well-equipped workshop (easily accessible materials were used — e.g. the paintings in French and Spanish caves were made with natural, solid dyes); the lack of artistic experiences collected by successive generations; the practical functions of all products of culture dictated simplicity and ease of use.

We must not forget that this category includes great many varieties of art. Archaic art is considered a category different from the art of primitive peoples mainly from the perspective of our modern culture. We know, for instance, that the archaic art of ancient Greece gave birth to the more refined, complicated stylistic forms, that it originated diverse styles, that it was developing, although the development was very slow. Perhaps, this form of art should be included in the next category — the origins of styles and artistic trends — yet the adopted division is justified by the fact that in the next category we are dealing with historically-known artists, individuals, whilst the beginnings of archaic art are lost in the past and one would rather suppose that it was created and made by collective effort.

8. The origins of artistic styles. Each style develops in three phases : initial, optimal and that of epigonic faithfulness. The first of them bears some marks of *ars in crudo* : it is fresh, direct, authentic, slightly naive (e.g. in the sense of unwavering faith in what one is doing, thus the lack of critical distance; in the sense of employing the simplest, not always the most appropriate, means of expression; not the realization of the work, but the vision of new artistic solutions, new art, becomes dominant here).

For instance : Giotto is recognized as the initiator of realistic painting — he is fresh and naive compared to, e.g. such realists as Courbet or Matejko; Vivaldi may be considered the originator of the beginning of baroque music — his compositions are simple, fresh, “naive” when compared with the representatives of the mature phase, ‘as J.S. Bach. Picasso’s *Maids of Avignon* marked a breakthrough in his art — technically rough, the work gives the impression of amateur origin. Yet did he later achieve the same, great directness, sincerity, authenticity of quest ?

Perhaps also the attempts of today’s artistic *avant-garde*, now confusing, will in the future be recognized as the original, naive

phase of the art which is to develop from them ?

9. Studies for works of professional art. An hypothesis may be offered that also in the creative processes of professional artists, masters and virtuosos, there occurs a phase during which *ars in crudo* finds expression. Sketches for paintings, notes for novels, musical notes, initial versions, may all be used to corroborate our hypothesis. Because they are made for the artists themselves, and not for the public, they are authentic, the haste of execution and the functions for which they are made make them fresh, unimproved, revealing more about the artist and his artistic predilections than the finished works (which are influenced by, e.g., automatized technical skills, regard for the public, etc.).

Each kind of *ars in crudo* ought to be investigated separately in relation to the overall situation in which it exists, with regard to its genesis (psychological, socio-cultural, social etc.), to the functions it fulfills, its artistic structure and the aesthetic values which it realized. One has to consider the specific personalities of the artists, and the way in which the given art impresses the perceivers, as well as the sensations it arouses. Another fact to be borne in mind is that one and the same work may occur in various aesthetic situations, therefore fulfilling various functions and exerting various influences (e.g. paintings of mental patients displayed at an exhibition where the selection was made according to aesthetic criteria, and shown in cycles depicting the development of the disease or the process of recovery). Many of the problems presented here could only be resolved after the carrying out of empirical studies. Having restricted ourselves to outlining the point of departure, and initial hypotheses, let us now pass to the analysis of the variety of *ars in crudo* which we have recognized as a model case — naive art.

The aesthetics of naive art

Naive art may be investigated in many aspects : that of theory of art, where the question arises, what artistic properties are inherent in the works of naive art (concerning technique, means, artistic structures etc.); that of history of art — concerning the origins of that art, its changes, influences etc.; that of sociology — how the art is installed in the community, what institutions are dealing with it, what are its social functions, etc.; that of philosophical anthropology, where we ask about the artist's attitude towards reality,

about his art philosophical and ideological contents, about how it is rooted in man's personality. Finally, it may be considered from the point of view of aesthetics, where attention is focused on the mutual connections and dependencies between the naive artist (his personality) and his work, the experiences of the perceiver and the aesthetic values realized in that art.

We shall mainly concern ourselves with naive painting, which demonstrates most fully what is *ars in crudo*. Considering it, we recall to the conception of "aesthetic situation"¹, which the fundamental elements are as following: an artist, a work of art, a perceiver, and the aesthetic values.

The naive artist. While indicating certain typical features of the naive artist we bear in mind that each case represents characteristic, often far-reaching individual varieties. The naive artist creates non-professionally, although in extreme cases his painting becomes his sole occupation (e.g. Nikifor). He is self-taught — though he may, consciously or half-consciously, draw from tradition, or he may do his apprenticeship with another naive artist; he does not, in fact, reject examples — he is simply not familiar with them, or is unable to understand them, to succumb to the influence of sophisticated, complex works — so he creates his own vision of art, finds his own technical means — possibly inspired (and we may assume that there is always some impulse influencing the choice of painting and of one of its forms) by something which is not quite perfect artistically but imposes itself due to its omnipresence (e.g. chromolithographs, church-fair reproductions of religious paintings, traditional religious painting, folk and sacral art etc.).

Creative motivations of naive painters are centred around the need for expression, for pronouncing one's outlook on the world, one's emotions and convictions; around what the artist deems most important and worthy of relating. This is often linked with an imperative of a moral nature: one's truth about world and life, experiences and hopes have to be recorded, saved from oblivion. As a rule, the naive artist goes through the process of isolation from the society, as well as from his closest friends (family) who do not accept his attitude towards life, and his "wasting time" for painting in particular. Thus, in social isolation, there originate obsessions (intellectual, emotional, artistic), individual artistic conception is born. Painting of such an origin is often hardly accessible for others, incomprehensible, weird. Sometimes it happens (more often now than in the past) that such a lonely artist is "discovered" —

recognized as fully shaped artistically, "ready made" (and not: "promising"). The fact of Douanier Rousseau's discovery by Picasso was significant; Walach, Nikifor, Ociepka were discovered in Poland. Left to his own fate, the naive artist creates for neither the money nor the fame. If regard for other people appears in his consciousness, they are usually concrete persons with whom he lives in close contact, who share his views and who have similar aesthetic tastes.

As a rule, the naive artists' inclinations for art are rarely revealed in their youth; they are then preoccupied with the realisation of their material aspirations, set up their families, they have numerous professional duties, wish to improve their well-being by extra jobs — all that leaves them with no time to spare, to realize their artistic interests. Naive artists are predominantly older people (over the age of 40), and the actual causes of their taking to painting can be found in violent experiences linked with their misfortunes (e.g. the death of a dear person, mutilation, disease). It is relatively often that creative passion appears in old age — due to excess of leisure, lack of professional duties, loneliness, sometimes infantile "disregard for the rest of the world". Finally, there are cases in which art plays no part — these are often border-line cases between psychical health and disease (Nikifor, Monsiel).

The work of naive art. It is hard to speak of some general separateness of naive painting, e.g. of "naive style" — this phenomenon is so wide-spread and rich that, but for a few exceptions, each artist has to be treated as unique (whilst stylistic differences characteristic of particular naive painters are clear). On the other hand, attempts are being made to highlight some general features, as common to all naive painting. Thus, our attention is turned to the inaptitude of drawing, the inability to solve problems of composition (spacial or colour) and perspective. These errors and inaptitudes, however, rarely occur simultaneously, most often one of them is balanced by the excellence of solution of other artistic problems. Poor drawing often co-occurs with the perfection of composition, or with an harmonious choice of colours, etc., which equips these works with particular internal tensions and contrasts. The lack of care for the accuracy of perspective leads, e.g., to compositions with numerous identical elements placed side by side — flowers on meadows, cities with many streets, houses with many windows, etc. As far as the subject-matter and contents go, the striking feature is the interpenetration of the forms of visible, real and fantastic worlds: naive painting often show how the invisible

world interferes with human fate, assuming visible forms (e.g. unusual figures of angels, fantastic animals, monsters, magical birds, etc.), while the real world is transformed into one of fantasy (e.g. due to twisted proportions). Closer study of these works and their origins enables one to say that, in their best part, they manifest great care to relate the truth. The naive artist does not assume the attitude of "game" — his works are not an "artistic game", he does not manipulate randomly chosen and assembled elements in order to obtain a particular artistic effect — artistic truth, as he understands it, consists in the agreement between what is expressed by the work and man's authentic world, his convictions, outlook, beliefs and expectations. And thus, e.g. what is usually received as Theofil Ociepka's fantastic world of imagination, is in reality almost an illustration depicting the other world which he had come to know from occult writings; in like manner, also unshaken is his faith in the existence of spirits inhabiting the subterranean corridors of coal- and salt-mines.

The perceiver of naive art. Although aesthetic experiences are in principle linked with the work itself, on whose directly given form is focused the aesthetic interest, in the case of naive art also the artist's personality is, in a large measure, taken account of. One is amazed, for instance, by surprising artistic solutions if it is known that they were employed by someone who had never studied painting, who had not seen much, who had grappled with his fate. In the face of a work of naive art we spontaneously ask, who was the artist. Sometimes the answer is inherent in the painting (e.g. all but a few paintings of one of the better-known naive painters, Carmelina di Capri, represent the real landscape of Capri, are scenes from the life of fishermen).

The question which comes to mind is, what sensations are provoked by the works of naive art. We are probably more likely to succumb to fascination, to strongly emotional sensations, than seek to understand the work. The expressiveness of naive art makes us react to it directly, perceiving the artistic foundation of the work, makes us easily figure out its literary contents and what the work is really all about.

For many perceivers, connoisseurs and lovers of art naive painting is today a particular oasis of calm and optimism; in modern civilization, where life is all technology and the art of professional artists, and especially those of the avant-garde, becomes through far-reaching experiments incomprehensible, alarming, shocking —

naive art makes possible the return to gentle meditation, to everlasting values. It is also valued as inspiring confidence thanks to its authenticity, as a manifestation of disinterested, spontaneous will to create. This change in the public's attitude towards naive art occurred in the XXth century, and especially during its latter half. In a period when the value of a work depended, in the public eye, on its technical perfection and the ability to create artistic illusion, inaptly painted pictures could not be acclaimed by the experts (they had, on the other hand, their adherents amongst the wide circles of the common people).

Aesthetic values of naive art. Aesthetic values is found in a work when it depicts (expresses) by the means specific for the given kind of art — an irrational aspect of human reality (science, on the other hand, is rationalized and logical). What we cannot express by means of notions, in the discursive language, the artist expresses by means of the "language" of his art. In order to find out about the aesthetic value of the work, one must reach to the world vision of the subject of that work and reconstruct the irrational attitude towards reality presented there. Let us then consider, from this point of view, the value of "naïveté".

Naïveté, as a positive aesthetic value, is not only the feature of particular fragments or pages of the work, but the work as a homogeneous whole. It is the expression of a vision of the world founded on the conviction that the world is, in principle, friendly to man, even though it is full of mysteries, things strange and unknown. It is a world whose power surpasses man, both in respect of the possibilities of comprehending it, and of conquering it. The world is not indifferent, but it interferes with human fate, both through visible factors accessible to the senses, and through invisible ones, accessible only to imagination and emotion. That world arouses rather confidence than awe. Naïveté is therefore tinged with optimism. Naïveté is optimistic even when it appears in connection with the representation of evil, or misfortune: death is often caricatured and ridiculed; sometimes it is friendly when it means the passing to a better life (pictures of the dying man surrounded by angels); wild beasts are not menacing; war is but the splendour of battle and victory.

In juxtaposing naive painting to professional works in the area of their relationship with reality, the principle difference may be perceived in the fact that naive art limits itself to the obvious structures of the visible world, directly transfers the simplest elements

from reality to art, assuming the stance of naive realism (the world is what it appears to be, as we see and feel it) — whereas virtuosolike, sublime professional art seeks deep structures that are not apparent in every-day vision of the world. Thus, the work of professional art reflects what the artist knows about the world, seeks the laws that govern it, or else consciously constructs new laws for the new, imagined reality — whilst the naive artist is fascinated with what he sees and feels directly. Quite often, he also “sees with the eyes of his soul”, thus interpreting in his own way that which he does not understand; these naive interpretations are sometimes the fruit not of the reason, but of emotion and intuition.

From the point of view of aesthetics, the conception of *ars in crudo* has a definite significance: it provides the chance for investigating and analyzing the problems of the artistic origins of the particular works, as well as trends (conventions, styles) in art, and of the origins of a work of art in the aspect of the creative process. It is art “*in statu nascendi*”, when artistic structures are barely beginning to emerge. It is the beginning of a work of art (artistic trend) when it has not yet been subjected to various technical manipulations, before it has been forced into stereotypical, traditional artistic structures. *Ars in crudo* may also be called — after Levi-Strauss — untamed, unconventional, “sauvage” art, not yet deprived of freshness, authenticity, when it is fully itself, when it has not yet become a standard product of artistic virtuosity. It is to such art that the artistic avant-garde of the latter of our century aspires.

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NOTE

¹My conception of the “aesthetic situation” has been presented recently in my article “Aesthetic Situation as the main subject of Philosophy of Art”, in: *Reports on Philosophy*, 1983, Cracow.