

**THE CRITIQUE OF THE AESTHETIC REASON, FROM THE
POINT OF VIEW OF J. MUKAROVSKY**

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The aesthetic activity

1. The aesthetic activity as a totalisation and agreement between ends, design, means and realisation means for Kant : free from external constraint, from moral and social commitment, from servitude¹.

To realize the unity of end (design), means and activity, simply means freedom of care and happiness. Why? Because the artist attains and realizes eternity and timelessness in the activity performed and its solidification in the Work. He has conquered death through his activity, which he ranks with that of a God and which consequently is called creativity.

Outside the work emerges the concern as to the relativizing levelling. In order to escape from this, the artist does not shut himself into a tower, on the contrary, he realizes a certain finality which can be performed quantitatively and qualitatively.

If, however, work and activity are absorbed by the culture industry and the culture business, then this concern permeates the work itself and hampers its growth and further development. The work gets petrified, though it might meet with much approval, by becoming a standardised mass product.

Aristoteles has defined the *scholè*, the carelessness or freedom of wage labour (for Kant the disinterestedness), as condition for the scientific or aesthetic activity. In Latin *scholè* was perverted into *otium*, this is leisure or rest outside one's usual duties and cares. *Scholè* implies much more namely the agreement 1) between subject and praxis and 2) the correspondence between subject and object. Numerous variations of this thesis figure in the works of Aristoteles himself. They sum up the theme of the whole of Greek finality and

of the Greek aesthetic activity, the poesis. So our term 'artist' was unknown to the Greeks, for them the 'artist' was the 'poet', not the painter, nor the sculptor, nor the musician.

Orpheus is THE musician-poet, the god-composer, the lyrical poet, in the same way as Homer and Hesiod were epic 'composers' and Aischylus or Aristofanes were dramatic 'composers'. By the Romans art was called 'ars' and the artist himself artifex, this is a useful work made by a craftsman. This was indeed the beginning of the double history of the artist-expert-craftsman and the artist-amateur, with in third position the art-lover, the connoisseur, the collector. Especially the amateur or art-lover develops a disinterested aesthetic taste and is free from care, namely happy. Kant's circumscription of the aesthetic judgment of taste does not only concern the active artist, but also and especially the art-lover, who is in a position to free himself from every kind of usefulness and theory, to enjoy a work of art aesthetically, namely disinterested (ohne Interesse).

Therefore Kant develops circumstantially and repeatedly a theory of joy and lust as aesthetic well-being, aesthetic 'complacency', namely as sublimation of joy and lust, produced by the satisfaction of certain needs and moral purposes. The sublimation of joy means aesthetic charm.

With him aesthetic well-being has a dreamlike-character, an illusionary and symbpic satisfaction permeated by pain and grief, which on no account can be called free from care. Freud's analyses of artists lead the artists through a hell of self-torture, resentment and symbolic torture of others. Oedipus is an example hereof. How is this with the author of tragedy itself and with the spectators? This Freud never has explicitly put to paper, but it stands to reason that both find themselves in a nightmare and after writing it or the performance of it go home relieved. Fortunately it was only a dream, a work of art...

2. In aesthetics one can always perceive a double dimension. There is a subjective element in the immediateness of the experience of the aesthetic object (the object pleases me to a larger or lesser extent) and it has a meaning which is conceived by a reflexion on the form and the contents of the object. These two elements come from opposite directions. The one — experience — is an encounter with the novel, the unknown, and the other — the reflexion — goes back to the known, it seeks the possibility of recognition.

By means of this reflexion the encounter with the aesthetic

object is given a form and is being situated in a world of experience. One who is doing this wrestles with the problem of the new, which tends to show a character of its own, and of the recognition, which again and again refers to what is known already. Yet he expresses himself and in this way develops an independence which does justice to the unique experience with the aesthetic object. The so-called aesthetic subject is torn between an experience which calls forth a remaining-silent and a reflexion which wants to be expressed.

The result is a self-symbolisation of the experience. By symbolification the road is opened to others who are capable of decoding the symbolised. In this way the aesthetic is socialised. In connection with that process Mukarovsky speaks of an aesthetic function, of norm and of value, a triad, which is typical of the aesthetic and thanks to which the tension between individual experience and reflected reality can be expressed. The novel is added through which the whole human praxis is profoundly changed. For that reason we let our attention dwell on the theory of J. Mukarovsky, then on the partial aspects of the aesthetic (function, norm and value) and what they can mean for the whole of human culture.

The aesthetic function

As aesthetic function is something that one can come across anywhere. Most important is it in art, but also outside art it is spreading round. The structure and handling of a language for example are often linked up with the use of language in literature. It is possible that something that is totally inartistic like a machine, yet acquires an aesthetic function. But the reverse also occurs, namely that something absolutely aesthetic like a piece of music acquires another function, for example an intimidating one. So there is no fixed borderline between showing an aesthetic function or not, the one overlaps the other. In this connection Dessoir has spoken of 'the dislimitation of art'. The aesthetic is not inherent in a certain object, but only occurs in specific social circumstances. It is a social group who at a certain time in a given situation ascribes an aesthetic function to a certain subject. Reality never poses the aesthetic function, it is always done by the subjective situation. In it the various functions converge. Therefore, the aesthetic always exists in relation with the extra-aesthetic. One always has to ask how relations lie so that the variable character and dynamics become clear.

Opposite functions control the aesthetic, it is both organized and disorganized by them. Thus a continuing impulse of development remains alive. The aesthetic is subdivided by many functions.

An important watershed appears to be art. What falls inside mainly belongs to the aesthetic. But the artistic is defined every time again. What was created in former days is harder to identify as being artistic, because we know far too little about the social structure of that period. At one time e.g., a building may be taken as an object of art, at another as a sports complex. So too in other forms of art in which one can find mixtures such as advertising/art, or art/education.

By the side of the well-known art forms one comes across 'marginal phenomena' such as film, photography, television, and the like, which at first glance demand another than an aesthetic function, but are more and more tending towards the aesthetic. In fact this is the reverse as in the 'recognised' forms of art which more and more tend to fulfil other functions such as advertising mentioned above.

A third mingling of the artistic-aesthetic occurs in the field of religion and scenic beauty. In religion the artistic often functions as an integral part, but then it has to satisfy certain requirements which are entirely alien to its real nature. An example of this is the colour symbolism of the figure of Maria. The religious function constitutes an obstacle to the aesthetic as a result of which a mingling occurs. In scenic beauty the aesthetic is present as a criterion for what has to be produced in culture. It is only the intention of the spectator who lays down the rules. With Plato the Beautiful appears as the universal, metaphysical order. At that moment art and nature are opposites : what is produced by man never possesses universal validity. The beautiful-and-natural shows an absolute character and so is free from subjective influences.

Nowadays it is rather the other way round: the artistic-aesthetic is the criterion for the natural, life outside art is aestheticized. The aesthetic is assigned a central role in the order of human society through which it should be normalised or regulated. The question, however, is how this regulation is realized. Looked at from the stance of the functions there are innumerable points of interplay between the aesthetic inside and outside art. Each product is incorporated somewhere in human life and as such it cannot reflect simplicity, it has to show dynamic features since man in his deeds is always tuned to various goals at the same time, which he cannot distinguish himself. It is not so that one function supersedes all the others in its

universality; this can only be the case in a concrete situation and then only from the point of view of the subject. For that reason there is no point in giving an enumeration of functions inductively. To do so deductively from the point of view of man should not have a period-bound character, and which for that reason does not succeed. The subjective aptitude we find in man as a species, is not a fixed well-defined concept and therefore is no way out.

A phenomenological approach, which is at the same time deductive may offer a solution on the base of the functions in-themselves. In that case it concerns the essence itself of the functions. For the subject this is the way of presenting itself, or of realizing itself with regard to the outside world. In that manner the function is still polyfunctional in character, because this realizing has to be interpreted. Not every function is forcefully directed at an immediate change within reality, that's why here realizing is more apt than 'acting on reality'.

This realizing can be effected directly and indirectly by means of another reality. Directly for example in the case of direct transformation of reality on the ground of considerations of utility. By way of another reality this is only possible by using a sign representing reality. So there are direct and graphic functions. The direct functions are divided into practical and theoretical ones. The practical functions are directed from the subject at transforming an object or reality. The theoretical function is there for and on behalf of the subject. It is directed at a projection of reality in the consciousness of the subject. The graphic functions can be divided into symbolic functions directed at the object, and the aesthetic functions tuned to the subject, but then as human species. The symbolic function is aimed at the activity of the relationship between the object symbolised and the symbolic sign. Both the sign and the reality signified by it appear as object. Where the activity fails, symbolism deteriorates into allegory, if not it keeps its vitality as symbol.

The aesthetic function transforms everything into signs. This sign is super-individual and does not serve for the expression of an emotion, for then this would be again strictly subjective. The sign serving an emotion has a practical function. The aesthetic sign does not serve anything at all, it is not an instrument, but belongs to the object. It does not affect a singular reality as does the symbolic sign, but it reflects reality as a whole. The aesthetic sign is projected by man into reality. Reality is an indirect datum, only the sign is direct,

but then it represents the whole.

Since only reality is pluriform, the practical functions are multiple and the others simple: they are, as you will realize, no direct reflexion of reality. The functions are essentially different in nature and therefore they cannot be reduced to one other. The artistic has more than an aesthetic function, so it cannot be separated from the rest. It always implies some polarity so that it remains dynamic. From what precedes it can be concluded that the aesthetic function is neither a property of a thing nor bound up with particular properties of a thing.

Moreover it is not a property of an individual : from a purely subjective point of view, this is without taking the form into account, an aesthetic function can change. Finally it may be observed that the preservation of an aesthetic function can only be realized by a collectivity. It is part of the relation between the human collectivity and reality.

The aesthetic norm.

The aesthetic norm too shows a dynamic character, although in essence the normative is rule-like and because of this tends to being invariable. Formerly regularity was achieved by structuring of the sense perception on the ground of metaphysical or anthropological presuppositions. This has given rise to much criticism, because then the norm was deducted exclusively from previous and consequently already well-known works, again and again it runs the risk of becoming a fixed code and of leaving the present social context out of consideration.

It is precisely from this social angle that the contradictory character of the norm shows itself: in the aesthetic the question is now to show clearly this latent tension. Therefore it goes further into the rules which show a tendency to be fixed, but whose limitedness is only too evident, because of this. This may be theoretically conceived as a dialectic antinomy which has always accompanied the development of the aesthetic. The struggle takes place between the compelling validity of an old norm and the regulating or orientating potential of a norm that is to be newly established.

The normative stems from man as a social being. The norm is laid down by a collectivity. In the light of the aesthetic norm one could construct a sociology with it. We speak of a norm when a generally recognised goal can be indicated and its value is

independent of the will of the individual or of his subjective experiences.

It is a product of the collective consciousness. This also holds for the aesthetic norm which is the criterion for the aesthetic well-being. By the norm the value is fixed. The individual is to such an extent dependent on it as he has to take a stand towards it.

The norm cannot be a natural datum in the sense of a law of nature. It is only limited by natural phenomena as we are used to see or hear within our spectrum of perception. From the human point of view principles have also been developed which, as it were, originate from the natural circumstances such as the 'golden section' or certain tonal proportions. Yet time and again the crux is the stance one takes in relation to those phenomena. Thus there has always been a multitude of aesthetic norms because diverse groups with a different collective consciousness have a mutual influence. Mostly this was attended by a state of tension, for each collectivity tried to force its rule as the real criterion on all the others. A change in the social conditions leads to a change in the aesthetic norms. In the course of time they have been posed and formulated again and again as a result of which their dialectic character could manifest itself even more clearly. The work of art as the aesthetically most recognised object always is an inadequate proof of the aesthetic norm, because in it this norm is interfered with. The norm is encroached upon continually. It is documentary for the old norm and indicative of the new one. These indications are shown by the disagreeable interfering elements which figure in the work of art. Aesthetic norms are also adopted outside the artistic as e.g. in behaviour. The stage or the film are continued in daily life and they effect the relations between people. From their behaviour could be gathered how this aesthetic norm is changing continually. Herewith the aesthetic shows that it has an educational character.

During the last few decades fashion has exercised an important influence on the aesthetic norm so that more than ever it is tied up with social groups. As a result of this aesthetic norms are going to influence each other even stronger and this easily leads to hybride such as a pop-folklore culture and the like. As in town fashion has a greater impact than in the country, people there are also more dependent on the aesthetically normative. In general there the aesthetic norm is stronger than the other norms. Again and again the element of absolutizing crops up.

Beside the reciprocal and mutual impact of aesthetic norms,

other norms such as the ethical norm may leave their stamp on the aesthetic. Norms may even pass into each other. Together they form a norm-structure which co-determines the social structure out of which another new collective consciousness may emerge.

In the social-cultural province norms come into being as a result of an individual free choice. Within this province the aesthetic is still the most autonomous. From this it follows that the artist often has the greatest freedom at his disposal to change other norms as long as this can be expressed within the scope of the aesthetic. This division of labour may meet with much criticism, because with this it is even more clearly affirmed that the artist is only free to work productively and not reflectively. Beside this pretentious kitsch can easily make use the aesthetic norm to conceal other norms which are not accepted by society.

The aesthetic value.

The aesthetic value is not only determined by the function and the norm, the scope of the function is surely larger than that of the value. Also the province of the norm is not the same as that of the value, because within art the value e.g. is more important than what holds good outside it

The appreciation for an aesthetic object judges the phenomenon as a whole, this is in its complexity. The object is an autonomous unit and the appreciation an individual act. The validity of the appreciation is linked up with the range of the value. This is determined by society and so it is a sociological issue. Therefore the aesthetic value is so different and variable in various kinds of fields. There can never be question of an eternal value because appreciation must be articulated and the individual who does so is place — and period-bound. Considered aesthetically the question is whether such a value can be absolute, since a work of art or another aesthetic object mainly has a temporary character. The inspiration shown by the artist in any combination of matter and idea, can be seen as belonging to the essence of the value of that work. This is a process of *energeia*, not a condition which may be considered by itself. The variability is not an accidental phenomenon which is linked up with the ignorance of man to reach an ideal, but is an integral quality of the aesthetic value. The dynamics of that value is rooted in its social character, namely in the relation between artist and public, or, in a larger setting, between art and society.

The aesthetic value is expressed in divergent shapes and figures, beside the various official art forms one has to reckon with the avant-garde, second-rate art (kitsch), etc. Each form represents an independent orientation of the aesthetic value so that adjustments and mixtures can occur between the appreciations of the aesthetic. From this it appears that the aesthetic value changes immanently, as a result of its own structure and also because of conditioning from outside through the social context. The value which a work has for somebody, is dependent on the time when and place where he meets with the work of art. In that context the value is not just only relative.

When we interpret a work of art it assumes a certain significance for us. It has the character of a sign and it is not an anthropological constant. As a sign it represents something and refers to it. By using a sign the individual can create meaning, and can interpretation be effected. He then becomes a member of the community who can interpret the sign. Every individual consciousness therefore is deeply permeated with a collective consciousness. All mental content is mediated by a sign. A work of art is a sign between creative artist and spectator. The latter has to interpret the work. The energiea hidden in the work of art evokes the ergon of the spectator so as to be able to assign meaning to it. This process is typical for the sign which has aesthetic values because there direct experience wants to be expressed. The material work is the outward sign which evokes a meaning in the collective consciousness. One might call this a common subjective consciousness. As the work of art as a sign cannot be fully defined, because it is metaphorical, it holds in itself a reference to a vague, unqualified reality. It is a complex of social phenomena such as politics, philosophy, religion, and the like to which the work of art refers, so that it within these can represent a certain period in history. This is not revealed through passive reflexion, it has to be extracted from the work with struggle and perseverance. From the stance of semiology it becomes clear that the work of art has an autonomous existence and a dynamic structure. It does not coincide with either the individual consciousness of the creator or with the collective consciousness of the spectators. It consists of :

- a. the material work, with the significance of a sensory symbol, by which an emotional value is expressed;
- b. an aesthetic object which is rooted in the collective consciousness and is significant;

c. it has a relation to social phenomena such as politics, philosophy, religion, and the like.

Through these relations which a work of art has with its surroundings external aesthetic values within the work are emphasized so much more. This is intensified by the interference of external aesthetic values in the spectators. Through this the aesthetic value is broken up into a dynamic interplay of external aesthetic values within the work of art. By means of this property it represents the driving force of the living-praxis of a community.

It is the essential function of the work of art to reflect the tension between the individual and reality. The more difficult it is to locate and understand the work of art, the greater the possibility it holds to reflect this tension. Art is going through an immanent development which has a dialectical relationship to the other structures in culture. Both the communicative and the autonomous semiological function convert the work into a dialectical antinomy of the development of art. This duality is expressed in a continually pendulating movement of the work of art between a reality to which it is accountable, and a validity which it forces upon itself.

As regards the aesthetic discursiveness.

The structures handled by Mukarovsky create an aesthetic object which comes into being by a projection of the material work against the background of an artistic and social structure. Together they form the whole of aesthetic ideas which at a certain time and place hold for a group.

Owing to the large number of social groups the variety of aesthetic norm systems is rather impressive. The comparatively great intensity of communication which occurs among the social groups causes me speak of a competition of norms. This results in a large degree of dynamics in the aesthetic and social system.

To be in a position to follow the developments of the structure one has to be familiar with the immanent regularities and the various relationships between the systems. This means that there can be no question of a cause-effect thinking, but rather of a functional dependence. The aesthetic cannot be explained, but only be described or interpreted. Nothing can be reduced to something else which would serve as an explanation for it.

For the aesthetic this holds to an even greater extent as the aesthetic object always refers to the original experience of the maker

as well as of the spectator. Both of them require an interpretation of that symbolic value. Symbolic, because feeling is always expressed by means of a metaphor. Being, the essence of the aesthetic object cannot be fixed or grasped by means of it. The aesthetic subject that expresses itself in favour of this, has got two souls. In the articulation it makes allowance for the silence which tries to retain the source of the aesthetic experience. The source or the aesthetic experience cannot be fixed, it can only be referred to.

By articulating, by signifying the subject leaves a trail which refers to that source. In that sense the subject has a double focus-point. When the subject pronounces itself it crosses the frontier from the inarticulate to the articulate and with it to the interpretation. This interpretation is placed in the whole system of a culture. It emerges as the result of the struggle the subject has to wage to go from one province to the other. Again and again the subject can take up a position in one of the two provinces as a result of which absolute clarity will be out of the question. When it pronounces itself it is referring and when it is silent it does not signify.

In spite of this the aesthetic system is described and seen as a development of something with a past and a future. This history in its turn is conceived as a system, because man poses history. This is a unity of synchrony and diachrony. Both points of view are appropriated by man as a result of which the system as well as the evolution claim their rightfulness. The two cannot be separated. From the one point of view one automatically comes to the other, it is a double focus-point !

The correct rational point of view cannot be claimed, because it excludes others. Then reality is violated. And only the measurable counts and the unverifiable is excluded. The order which is reflected in it protects culture against disturbing factors. It conceals the disorder that is the origin of that culture. In our culture quite a lot miscarries, so that a plea can be made in favour of some disorder from which alternative choices can be made. This is the case with the aesthetic discursiveness which rejects the one-dimensional nature of the rational logical reality and replaces it by a double centrality. It makes choices and in this way creates meanings, but keeps alive the bond with the source and is conscious of the narrow shifting base on which the right of choice rests.

The choice of science to exclude art is therefore open to criticism. Its presupposition is that science knows and art 'can' or 'does'. Science, knowing, is a process of recognizing. Significance is

placed within well-known frame-works. Art produces in a free manner, it creates new images and must not be inhibited by recognizing-machines. This division of labour is not justified because the two cannot exist independent of each other. Science and art alike would benefit from the recognition of this insight.

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NOTE

¹When the professional artist is obliged to carry out certain assignments, he no longer has the disposal of his self-activity and finds himself stuck in a situation of compulsion which makes life appear to him to be without egress. He lands in boredom and one way or another he becomes unhappy and listless. The free artist who has the free disposal of his life, can make a work without fearing the judgment of others, without having to fear their disapproval or having to expect their applause. It is true he cannot live without the World. An artist aims at showing his work. A writer wishes to be printed and read. When, however, the compulsion or the duty to do so arises, the writer runs the risk of losing the real ground and effectiveness of his activity.

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