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## **Art Criticism and the Objectivity of the Judgement of Taste**

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# Art Criticism and the Objectivity of the Judgment of Taste

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W. A. DE PATER

ONE has the impression sometimes that being a good philosopher of art implies having been a failure in two ways, as a philosopher and as an artist. Although this impression, were it right, should encourage me to write the present essay, there are very strong arguments against it. The philosophy of art is connected with the essential parts of philosophy (e.g., the theory of knowledge and the philosophy of man) in such an organic way that weakness in one field will have its repercussions in the other fields of inquiry. It is true that there will always be weak points, and very weak ones, if not in the whole of philosophy, then at least in the philosophy of art. But the mark of a good philosopher is not necessarily his ability to solve all problems and to do away with all the weak points. Very often the best he can do is to locate the problems, formulate them, together with their supposed inevitability, and spell out the repercussions that this state of affairs has on other inquiries.

## THE FUNCTION OF AN ART CRITIC

One such weak point—which will be the subject of this paper—is that in the philosophy of art one presumably has to start from the experience of works of art. The question then is: What works of art? Philosophers often take the easy way out in contemplating only such generally accepted works as

arts.<sup>5</sup> Now if someone prefers to walk those imaginary paths, he should know how to populate his museum. Which (contemporary) works should he admit to his collection and which ones should he reject? He must decide, therefore, which products are works of art and which ones are not.

But once it is accepted that works of art are to be identified by their effect upon the observer, and that this effect presupposes a receptivity which is to be developed by the kind of education a critic is supposed to possess, it becomes probable that the decision about the aesthetic character of given works has to be made by critics, or at least that the one who has to decide here needs the help of a critic. That is not to say that a philosopher can never make this decision without the special advice of another person who is a critic. There are football players who are good chemists at the same time, and similarly there are philosophers who are also art critics (although the *philosophus poeta* was the classical example of a *unio per accidens*). But it is not as a philosopher that the critic has the charism of discernment in these affairs. The work of art, indeed, speaks a language which has to be learned.

In this sense I ascribe to the critic a competence that a philosopher does not have, although there have been historical failures (cf. Beethoven's conflict with his critics), and Paul Ziff calls it "horrible nonsense" to speak of a competent observer.<sup>6</sup> According to him, "no one is competent or not competent to look at the belly of a Titian nude." How much of a simplification this is is shown two pages further on where we are told: "You must know how to look at a Mondrian," and that not everybody actually does know how. Ziff's general conclusion is that "reasons in criticism are worthwhile because they tell us what to do with the work," which means, in his essay, that the critic tells us which act of seeing has to be

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<sup>5</sup> We know that the eidetical analysis of the acts of consciousness does not always require a real object; thus we might speak of an "imaginary museum." But this analysis must have been preceded by the experience of real works of art. The philosopher is not an "eidetical artist" who should create all kinds of imaginary works of art.

<sup>6</sup> P. Ziff, "Reasons in Art Criticism," *Art and Philosophy* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1966<sup>3</sup> [1964<sup>1</sup>]), 619.

performed in connection with the work. It is true, of course, that each one has to perform this act by himself, and that it is rather odd to speak of competence in this connection. In this sense Ziff seems to be right. But since the act of seeing involves a certain attitude there is room for competence. To know which attitude to adopt in skiing is one thing, to be able to ski another. This is not to say that the contemplation of art requires a kind of acrobatic attitude, but that the seeing implies more than Ziff seems to admit. If ten persons are told by a critic how to look at a contemporary art product, very likely only two or three of them will see what is to be seen.

Besides instruction, something more seems to be needed which not everybody appears to possess, but which the critic must have—sensitivity to art. This sensitivity Ziff seems to reduce to an ability to find the right attitude (in the case of a critic) or to adopt it (for those who follow the critic's advice). But in point of fact, the inverse is more likely to be the case; the attitude is a function of the sensitivity. It is because of his sensitivity to art that the critic discovers which is the right attitude in order that a work of art can exercise all its influence, and it is because of their sensitivity that other persons, adopting the same attitude, have the aesthetic experience. Otherwise the lack of this experience in the seven or eight less lucky persons becomes inexplicable. It is not unreasonable then to call the critic and his successful audience "competent" because of their stronger sensitivity, just as those who are able to see colors are called competent as opposed to those who are color-blind. And the critic merits the title "most competent" insofar as his work of discovery or invention presupposes the strongest sensitivity.

#### OBJECTIVITY AND NORMS

It seems, therefore, that philosophy of art, based on aesthetic experience, depends upon a rather subjective element, sensitivity and its judgment of taste.<sup>7</sup> This subjectivity has

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<sup>7</sup> Some distinctions should be made here as to the proportion between one's own sensitivity to art and the dependence on the judgment of a critic. A philosopher, for instance, may be sensitive to some

been brought out in many ways. Thus it is said that judging an objective like "artistic," "beautiful," or "grotesque" is not a simple matter of ascertaining an objective property like "square" or even "red."<sup>8</sup> In the last case the judgment is, so to speak, forced upon the observer, and although there is always an element of construction in judgments, this element is minimal in this case as opposed to that of the aesthetic judgment. Bayer even speaks of "*une qualité médiatisée*" insofar as the resonance in the subject has to play an important role in the aesthetic judgment. To judge that something is beautiful involves much more activity on the part of the observer than the pronouncement that it is square. This makes understandable why the expression "I find it square" is rather odd, whereas "I find it beautiful" is not.<sup>9</sup>

This interpolation of the subjective response seems to withdraw aesthetic judgments from the realm of science and objectivity. It can even be said that aesthetic judgments essentially lack that impartiality needed for the sciences, because they come about in enthusiasm (or disgust), in being fascinated. The art critic must be, as Mr. Eric Torres put it, a lover of art. He does not merely ascertain; he adheres. Outside art one can perhaps evaluate without enjoying (or being disgusted by) the object, but in art one cannot do this. Even judging that something is aesthetically tolerable implies an emotional reaction. On this point, therefore, I disagree with the otherwise very thought-provoking article of Mr. J. C. Urmson, who thinks that in this case there is merely the report of the absence of any emotion, made in an aesthetic light.<sup>10</sup> In

contemporary works of art but not to all of them. However, our main subject is not the role which the art critics must play in a philosophy of art.

<sup>8</sup> R. Bayer, "De quelques particularités du jugement de gout," *Deuxieme Congress International d'esthetique et de Science de l'art* (Paris, 1937), I, 238-243.

<sup>9</sup> The expression "I find it square" can sometimes make sense. However, if it does make sense, it is already an expression of aesthetic approval or, which is more likely, disapproval.

<sup>10</sup> J. O. Urmson, "What Makes a Situation Aesthetic?" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume xxxi (1957). For a further foundation of my opinion, cf. R. Ingarden, "Aesthetic

the aesthetic approach, however, there is always the expectation of satisfaction, and an emotion of disappointment arises when this satisfaction is not brought about. As to whether this emotion is a specifically aesthetic one is another question.

Once granted that aesthetic judgments involve a large amount of subjectivity, the question naturally arises as to whether there can be some objectivity nevertheless. It seems, indeed, that subjectivity is not always opposed to objectivity. In fact the terms "subjective" and "objective" are rather ambiguous. In one sense they indicate a certain distortion of reality ("a subjective account of the facts") as opposed to an agreement with the facts. In another sense, "subjective" means the presence of a certain emotion or reaction in the person involved ("the subjective dimension does not count in the natural sciences") as opposed to the impersonal character of "objective." These two senses of "subjective" are connected by the presence of a certain amount of construction by the subject in both cases, and it is in relation to the extent of this construction that we speak of "subjective" in the first or in the second sense. The question is: Are aesthetic judgments, which are subjective at least in the second sense, objective in the first sense, i.e., do they have universal validity because they are in accordance with the facts?

Now facts are less factual than they were dreamt to be in the past. They always belong to a context. Exegetes became aware of the religious context of biblical facts in their discussion with Bultmann. That things consist of substance and accidents has long been a philosophical fact. Even a "purely" historical fact is "co-constituted" by its reference to human destiny. That Caesar crossed the Rubicon is an historical fact because it meant rebellion against the Roman *senatus* with all its implications for the course of history. And in like manner the problem of the objectivity of the aesthetic judgment is the quest for agreement with aesthetic facts, which are constituted by what they arouse (in principle) in the observer. It is here that the question of aesthetic norms comes

in. They try to formulate the conditions that must be satisfied for something to be an aesthetic fact. Once these conditions are known, one can be sure, it seems, of the objectivity of one's judgment of taste. If they are fulfilled, there is a work of art, and the aesthetic judgment, subjective as it is in the second sense, will be objective in the first sense if it affirms the aesthetic quality of the work concerned.

But becoming acquainted with the aesthetic norms is rather deceptive in this respect. The verifiability they present is too one-sided to be effective. If the norms are general they are not aesthetic (they do not decide the question as to whether this particular object is a work of art); if they are aesthetic they are bound up with the given individual work, and are therefore not norms at all. Thus critics (and among them Mr. Torres) normally offer three sets of norms by which to judge a given work. In the first, the most general requirements are formulated, such as order and harmony, and sometimes more culturally limited ones such as the calming effect of horizontals and blue (whereas a vertical blue would have a rather odd effect on the harmony). The second kind of criteria formulates the laws proper to the style to which the work belongs. Both kinds of laws certainly are of use. They give hints, for instance, as to how to look at a given work, i.e., what attitude one should adopt in order to discover the splendor of the work. Venetian paintings lend themselves to an act of seeing involving attention to balanced masses; the Florentine school demands attention to contours.<sup>11</sup> But useful though they may be, neither of these norms is a standard for measuring the objectivity of the aesthetic judgment. Abstracting from the difficulties regarding their content (e.g., what is the import of "order?"), they only formulate necessary conditions, and are not sufficient. That is, to be a work of art the given object must satisfy the conditions which the norm formulates; but to satisfy these conditions does not imply that it is a work of art. Knowing the norms and obeying them, I can produce the most horrible *Ersatz*.

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<sup>11</sup> P. Ziff, "Reasons in Art Criticism," 620. Cf. note 6.

The third set of norms is of those internal to the work itself. They stress the uniqueness and inimitableness of the work of art which, as Miss MacDonald once said, can be judged in the last resort, perhaps, by no standard but its own.<sup>12</sup> This kind of norm, indeed, is aesthetic, but nevertheless it does not give us the help we are looking for. There can be no discourse about that which is simply unique.

Perhaps Mr. Strawson made a point here by introducing the distinction between properties and features.<sup>13</sup> In Strawson's context both are a basis for evaluative terms, but features cannot be shared by other works, whereas properties can. Aesthetic assessment is made on the basis of features; their totality individuates a work of art. Properties, on the other hand, appeal to interests and aims, and are therefore open to general rules and recipés which formulate how things must be made in order to obtain the practical use expected. Evaluative judgments concerning washing machines can easily be considered objective. They are based on shareable properties, such as speedy operation and efficient cleaning. Aesthetic features do not appeal to such interests and aims, and therefore cannot be normalized by them. Works of art possess properties, too, such as being economic (sometimes), stimulating, and even being written in hexameters. But it is not on account of these qualities as such that aesthetically evaluative norms are made.

If this is true—Mr. Strawson presents his account of the disinterestedness of the aesthetic experience in a rather hypothetical way—we might say that the first two kinds of aesthetic norms mentioned above concern the properties of a given object, and the third kind its features. By the structural qualities of the work of art those properties which are pointed to in the general norms become features themselves, in the same way as the artifactum (a piece of stone, for instance) becomes a work of art in the aesthetic experience. But the

<sup>12</sup> M. MacDonald, "Some Distinctive Features of Arguments Used in Criticism of the Arts," [Originally in:] *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume xxiii (1949); quoted from *Art and Philosophy* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1966<sup>3</sup> [1964<sup>1</sup>]), 599-604.

<sup>13</sup> P. F. Strawson, "Aesthetic Appraisal and Works of Art," *The Oxford Review*, 1(1966), nn. 3, 5-13 (esp. 11-13).



norms do not explain when and why this is the case. The consequence is that the first set of norms as such warrants the objectivity of the judgment of taste, but merely concerns the common likes and dislikes, whereas the really aesthetic enters only with the third kind of norms, which on account of their being limited to the individual work do not help in judging.

This can be illustrated and confirmed by a prudent method of buying works of art. If one decides to buy a painting, one acts wisely by not buying it at first sight. He must come back again and again, and if after, say, five times, the painting still fascinates him, there is an indication that he is on the track of a real work of art. The basis for this test of time is that the likes and dislikes ("I like blue"), dominant as they are in the beginning, lose their force after a certain amount of contact, whereas the really aesthetic never palls. Only the real work of art does not tire. There is, in fact, a progressive approximation of the aesthetic. One way of analyzing this phenomenon is that which is based on the model of a language which has to be learned. Along this line of thought is the neo-hegelian thesis, formulated by Merleau-Ponty, that the artist creates his own public. "*Le public qu'il vise n'est pas donné, c'est celui que son oeuvre justement suscitera*"<sup>14</sup>

A partially complementary approach has been made by Mr. Bayer.<sup>15</sup> According to him, the progressive approximation is analyzable in three stages. At first the observer feels a satisfaction of a rather simple sort. The work is pleasant to the senses, what he calls "*le plaisir du vulgaire*." Generally speaking it is the material of the work of art which causes his pleasure, for instance, its blue as tranquilizing. A second delight arises with the discovery of the way the artist ordered his material, "*le plaisir du technicien*." It is the understanding of the moulding process, the impression that the artist succeeded well in shaping the material. These two first stages roughly correspond to the general norms critics apply in judging works of art. They are concerned with what is not exclusively proper

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<sup>14</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, "*Le langage indirect et les voix du silence*," *Signes* (Paris, Gallimard, 1960), 92.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. note 8.

to the work of art, with what might exist as properties elsewhere but takes on the character of features only in the true work of art. With a little ingenuity anybody can produce a work which pleases in these ways. One might even ask if the first stage is necessary at all to a work of art. The painting of a battlefield can be shocking, far from "pleasant," and nevertheless be a work of art. But what can be retained is that there must be an evocative force of the material together with a certain "mise en forme." The word "together" must be stressed perhaps, with the result that Bayer's analysis can be better understood on the model of levels of experience rather than of a sequential order. The temporal aspect enters only because of the fact that man in the "lower" ranges of experience reacts more quickly but less durably than in the "higher" ones, a fact on which the "test of time" in buying a painting rests. The "properties" of the work of art, meeting our demands when they are present, and disappointing us when absent, are most striking in the beginning, but do not have the same meaning for us in the long run (we take their presence for granted or resign ourselves to their absence), in contrast with the authentically aesthetic which is situated in a third stage (or on a third level), conditioned by the first stages but surpassing them. Its experience is "*le plaisir de la nature artiste*," arising exclusively from a confrontation with a real work of art, a "*discipline du sentir*" in which our receptivity is, so to speak, shaped. It is the experience of being rhythmically disciplined in our feeling and knowing. Its object is the "features" of Mr. Strawson. Our need for being tranquilized can become saturated, the intellectual pleasure in the ingenuity of the ordering loses its force after the discovery. They depend on the "properties," which are the object of a critic's general norms. But the "features" always remain interesting. They are ever fascinating in a new way. They make the test of time work, and they are the genuinely aesthetic, but by this very fact are limited to this given, unique work of art, and pointed to by the third kind of norms, which as we saw are no norms at all: "The work must be as it is."

## THE NATURE OF ART AND THE AESTHETIC MOMENT

It is clear that for our problem concerning the objectivity of the judgment of taste, a further analysis of this third stage can be promising. If the authentically aesthetic experience consists in rhythmically disciplined feeling in our inner life, then we might infer from the presence of this feeling that we are in contact with a real work of art. But what is it to feel rhythmically disciplined? Many people have had some experience of this sort without there being a work of art. The same applies to other descriptions of the third stage. According to Heidegger the work of art creates a world. The farmer's shoes of van Gogh evoke the whole world of a peasant, the tenacious steadiness of the slow walk through the wide-stretching furrows of the field, the moisture and fertility of the soil. But the difficulty is that I do not need van Gogh for this vision. A pair of worn out shoes itself might disclose such a world to me. Or was it van Gogh who taught me to look at shoes in this way? But even then, Heidegger's description can scarcely serve as a test. If a painting creates a world for me, it does so perhaps without being artistic; if it does not, I (and all critics with me) possibly still have to learn how to look at it.

Other formulations of the aesthetic effect which certainly touch the essential as distinct from the level of likes and dislikes are not any more successful in the solution of our problems. Thus it is often said, and quite rightly, that art gives us reality in its sensible appearance, that art teaches us to look at the world in new ways. This opinion, a generalization of the theories of Vico and von Humboldt concerning poetry, is commonly held even at present. But as a test it does not work either, because the same can be said of a car crash and a sunset on Manila bay, whereas it is difficult to apply the test to such an intellectual affair as a fugue. Artistic products such as fugues are perhaps better understood from the viewpoint of Reigl's description, quoted with much approval by H. Read,<sup>16</sup> that the artist makes thought visible (in the wide sense), without the intermediary of verbal concepts. But ges-

<sup>16</sup> H. Read, *Art Now: An Introduction to the Theory of Modern Painting and Sculpture* (London, Faber and Faber, 1960 [1933], 32,

tures do the same, and so do most artifacts. This applies also to Merleau-Ponty's explanation of the work of art as being the explicitation of meaning in the world, the inauguration of sense, a matrix of ideas.<sup>17</sup> The author himself defines gesture as an "expression primordiale."<sup>18</sup>

Another characteristic often referred to is the disinterestedness of the artistic emotion, the subjective counterpart of Strawson's "features." But what makes its test-value suspect is that this notion has been introduced first as the formulation of the Greek ideal of science, the *theoria*. E. Bullough translated the term as "psychical distance" and raised it to an aesthetic principle which will turn out to be fruitful, though not at this stage of the problem.<sup>19</sup> Bergson spoke of the perception of colors, forms, sounds, etc., for their own sake. But even formulated in this way there is no convertibility with art or even with beauty.

This list of characteristics, which can be extended at will, certainly has its value in the articulation of what goes on in an aesthetic experience, and this is reason enough to reproduce the list. But as regards the problem of the objectivity of taste it does not give us much help. Perhaps it will be of more use at this point to look for a formal definition of art, so that we can find the source of all the characteristics summed up so far. Our expectations, however, should not run too high. Aristotle taught that by the very identity between definition and the defined, there can be strict definition only of what has one single nature, if the definition is to possess some unity of meaning.<sup>20</sup> That is why "vegetable" cannot, strictly speaking, be defined. Now what we are looking for is the "nature" of something as multiform and as manifold as art. Even if one were

<sup>17</sup> *Signes* (Cf. note 14), 68, 85, 96-97.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>19</sup> E. Bullough, "Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," *The British Journal of Psychology*, 5(1912). Also in *Art and Philosophy* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1964), 534-551.

<sup>20</sup> *Topica*, VI, 10, 148 <sup>a</sup>22-25; 4, 141 <sup>a</sup>31-<sup>b</sup>2; 14, 15, <sup>b</sup>16-17. For an application, cf. I, 15, 107 <sup>a</sup>36-<sup>b</sup>5 and commentary by W. A. de Pater, S.C.J., *Les Topiques d'Aristote et la dialectique platonicienne. La methodologie de la definition* (Fribourg, Ed. St. Paul, 1965), 222-225.

to limit himself to only one of the fine arts, let us say sculpture, one could ask if there exists enough continuity between, for instance, old Greek and contemporary sculpture, to allow us to speak of one single art and of a sameness or even a similarity of aesthetic experience. Definitions of art, accordingly, are so general as to be almost meaningless. Thus, for example, the definition I once heard: "orderly arrangement of elements," where "elements" is a variable to be substituted for by "sounds," "colors," "words," etc. Apart from the fact that this definition is so general that it includes even department stores and the writing desk of a clerk, it only expresses what we called the second level of the aesthetic, to which the "*plaisir du technicien*" refers. This is a rather general weakness of all other definitions of art. The scholastic definition "*quod visum placet*" if not explained further does not even go higher than the first level, that of sensible likes. It is only by explicitation that its merits, one of which, for instance, is its bridging the gap between objectivistic and subjectivistic interpretations of art, can be discovered. Likewise the definition "orderly arrangement" points to something very essential, but that something has to be specified by the finding or recovery of an order in ourselves, a harmony in our knowing and feeling. The ordering of elements is a very human occupation ("*rationis est ordinare*") and the whole of culture can be defined as a battle against the entropy in nature, the natural course of things. But such an occupation is likely to be frustrating, man being intimately connected with and even part of nature. Art, too, orders nature, but in such a way that nature regains its own rights; art re-establishes the cultivated in its pure naturalness, and by doing so art brings man back to himself, re-naturalizes the alienated human being. But it does so by humanizing nature. Art plays a role, therefore, in the preservation of the human race; it re-establishes nature, that is true, but by this very fact (art being a human act) nature becomes akin to man. Thus art reconciles earth and world, and at the same time man with himself, man who for a moment stops putting nature at his service. So order and disinterestedness come together in the most properly aesthetic level which Bayer described by reference to man's being rhythmically dis-

ciplined in his feeling and knowing. The harmonizing effect of disinterested contemplation is much needed in our time when, as the psychiatrist A. Terruwe puts it, the *irascibilis* dominates over the *concupiscibilis*. But all this goes a little bit further than was formulated in the definition of art quoted above.

A direct reference to the strictly artistic is found in the structural description of art by Gaboury, who in continuity with the thoughts just developed, dedicated his work "a ceux qui par la magie de leurs mains imaginant un mode autre réalisent la matière."<sup>21</sup> To structuralism in art is due the credit for having brought out a fundamental condition of aesthetic effect, the fact that elements achieve their effect by being contrasted within a unity. It is not the isolated color which impresses us, but a color in contrasting surroundings, just as in linguistic structuralism it is pointed out that phonemes function by being situated within a system of opposition. It is by their being structured that works of art can give aesthetic experience. Thus Gaboury defines the work of art as "une matière structurée de façon émouvante,"<sup>22</sup> in which it is interesting to recover the three levels of art experiences we exposed earlier; "matière" referring to the material which was at the basis of the "plaisir du vulgaire," "structurée" to the ordering element we met at the second level, "de façon émouvante" to the being rhythmically disciplined in our feeling and knowing. This definition has the merit of mentioning the third level, the ultimately genuine one, but it is not surprising that this definition, too, has to be understood against a certain background. For what is this "de façon émouvante?" Surely, after all the foregoing, we are not to be told that the work of art causes feelings in us insofar as it is structured material (almost every artifact would be artistic in this sense), although the third level is conditioned by the first two, which Gaboury affirms by saying that the structured material is "de soi expressive" (p. 89). In fact his explanation is that "the work of art moves

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<sup>21</sup> Pl. Gaboury, *Matière et Structure. Réflexions sur l'oeuvre d'art*. Préface de J. Brault. (Bruges/Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1967).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 85-97, esp. 94.

us because it is a coherent and convincing expressing of a universe other than that of every day" (p. 91). The world of everyday, Heidegger would say, is the world of *Seinsvergessenheit*, the world where being is buried in oblivion, because of our putting it to the service of our needs. In art we order nature again, disinterestedly, in such a way that it regains its rights. The creating of a world, which according to Heidegger is essential to art, is brought about by the appearance of the hidden earth. Contrary to what happens elsewhere, in works of art the material, the earth, is not submerged in the product but shown in its true nature. The effect is different from likes and dislikes, but akin to the experience we described as bringing back man to himself by re-establishing nature. That it evokes the world of a peasant (in the case of the farmer's shoes of van Gogh) or that of a praying people (Greek temple) is aesthetic only insofar as art expresses and activates this connection of kinship of man's world with earth, with nature. In such a way all the characteristics of the strictly aesthetic come together—the ordering, the disinterestedness, the creating of a world. At the same time it becomes clear why art is said to teach us how to look, or to give reality in its sensible experience. It is the earth appearing, which makes perception worthwhile for its own sake. And by evoking a world, art is at the same time an "explicitation of meaning," making thought visible without verbal concepts.

Thus there is a pleasure which is not quite the same as that given by the "likes" (the material and its structure as such). It is a pleasure appealing to man on a level which is more commonly human than that of individual preferences or likes, and this pleasure is the most strictly aesthetic. This is the reason why the famous "there is no disputing about tastes" does not apply, I believe, to art. There is disputing about the likes, because they are bound up with the individual (although they can be formulated in general terms). They correspond to his needs (e.g., for calm), which partly are the need of a whole culture (finding its compensation in a given style). Even the dislikes can prevent us from exposing ourselves to the work of art. We may close ourselves to the work if it does not please us in the first sense, that of "*le plaisir du vulgaire*" and

that of the "technicien." Art education aims to a great extent to control these likes and dislikes, these properties. But the pleasure of the really aesthetic, although it cannot be formulated in general terms appeals to a level which is not bound up with the individual or with a particular culture, because it concerns that which is most deeply human. The judgment of taste in art criticism can be objective because it is possible to transcend mere caprices, mere likes. This objectivity, as I pointed out, is far from being impersonal. Art concerns us in a profound way. The objectivity meant is the opposite of the subjective in the sense of a distortion of reality; if the judgment is in agreement with the facts it must have a universal validity.

Now it has become gradually clear, perhaps, where we have to look for the source of distortion in the aesthetic judgments. Its domain is very probably that of the likes and dislikes, that is, the domain of the internal structure of the individual in contradistinction to the commonly human. Objectivity, then, is what is not bound up with the structure of the individual; it is what corresponds to that which is common to all men (whereby the identity of the object is presupposed).

#### KANT AND THE COMMON STRUCTURE OF SUBJECTIVITY

As a matter of fact it was Kant who founded the objectivity of the aesthetic judgment on the identity (or better, similarity) of the structure of human subjectivity. Objectivity (in the first sense) is based by him upon a common subjectivity (in the second sense), a fact which can be explained only in the light of the strictly aesthetical as not being identical with the levels of the likes and dislikes. It is amazing to see how all the fertile ideas of the past and those of our own time are combined in Kant's theory. There can be no question of summarizing his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* within the limited space of this article, but some illustrations might be given. (It must be borne in mind that Kant most of the time speaks of beauty in general, of which artistic beauty is only a kind.) For Kant the aesthetic judgment is the intuition of something in the realm of nature and necessity, because it is a phenomenal ex-



pression of the noumenal realm of freedom and value.<sup>23</sup> This starting point was in line with the theory of A. Baumgarten (1714-1762) who located the beautiful at the intersection of sensitive and intellectual knowledge, and thereby in the realm which is intermediate to nature (object of the senses) and value (object of the intellect). This means in his theory (as derived from Wolff and Leibniz) that the beautiful is the intersection of truth (nature) and goodness (value). This, in fact, was the scholastic conception of the beautiful as "verum boni" and "bonitas veri", but approached in an epistemological way. If viewed in an anthropological way, and Kant's theory was of great help here, this conception becomes the interpretation of beauty as the intersection of earth (nature) and world (the realm of freedom, essentially human) which is the theory of Heidegger. Perhaps Kant was not aware of all these, but it is the pride of a historian to be able to understand an author better than he understood himself.

This intuition of something as an expression of the noumenal, this judgment of taste, is called "subjective" by Kant, since it is grounded on feeling (i.e., intuition, or non-conceptual knowledge), and at the same time "objective" in reference to its content, a quality of the real, which implies, according to him, that beauty is objective in relation to the subjective ground of the judgment.<sup>24</sup> This is Kant's way of saying that "beautiful" and similar predicates are not the same as the predicate "square," and by this theory Kant foreshadows the phenomenological approach which bridges the gap between objectivistic and subjectivistic conceptions of art. The phenomenal, in Kant's vision, becomes expression; the sensible becomes sign and symbol. It is therefore *in* the sensation that judgment takes place. This theory, formulated for the first time by Aristotle, had been forgotten for a long time, and this fact caused the separation of philosophy (domain of the intellectual judgment) and art criticism (allegedly the domain of sensation only). It is since Kant, who stressed the unity

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<sup>23</sup> I. Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin, Preus. Academie der Wissenschaften, 22 Bande, 1902-1942), Band V: *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, lvi.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, xxx-xli.

of reflection and sensation, that philosophers and critics have been able to come together in an aesthetic of expression. The harmonizing tendency of Leibniz is still obvious. It is in fact on the basis of the interpenetration of the noumenal and the phenomenal that Kant could put together understanding and reason, cognition and desire, in the judgment which he calls "feeling." Our faculties, in other words, are no longer separated in their realms. They come together where these realms meet, in beauty (and objective finality). In this way our inner life is harmonized, or as Bayer would say, "rhythmized;" in this way the perception of the world becomes worthwhile for its own sake. This is what Kant calls the "subjective finality", the external world as conformable to our mental powers, nature as knowable (and thus as participating in the noumenal).<sup>25</sup> This "purposiveness" of nature which is directed towards the mental powers of man is the *a priori* of the aesthetic judgment, the non-conceptual feeling, or intuition of beauty.

This is the background for Kant's remarkable description of the aesthetic characteristics. The way he puts it is rather artificial since he ties them up with the properties of the judgment as he knew them from (his poor) logic—quality, quantity, relation, and modality. Actually these properties function as commonplaces, i.e., as formulae to guide the research in order to discover material. As a matter of fact they can be neglected completely, and we will sum up the characteristics of the aesthetical without mentioning these "logical" properties.

Thus the first characteristic of beauty is, according to Kant, that it causes satisfaction without reference to desire; aesthetic experience is completely disinterested, it is contemplative.<sup>26</sup> It is what Strawson called the judgment based on features. A still life of apples is not beautiful insofar as the apples appeal to my appetite, but insofar as they arouse a disinterested pleasure. The existence of the apples does not even matter.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, xlv-lxviii

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

This fact, Kant says, is the basis of a second characteristic of beauty, that it pleases universally, without a concept.<sup>27</sup> My judgment (that something is beautiful), being disinterested, is not dependent on any private condition, on which it would depend were it concerned with likes and dislikes. Therein lies the ambiguity of the term "judgment of taste." As Kant understands it, its object is the aesthetic, whereas others understand it as concerning the evaluation of non-aesthetic properties. To me both are implied in the judgment of taste. In making the former judgment we claim universal validity, but in the second class of judgments we do not. This, in fact, was also our conclusion from the analysis of aesthetic experience and its three levels. Artistic taste, therefore, is not bound up with the individual person. Not everybody contemplating a given work actually finds it beautiful; but if it is a work of art everybody *should* find it beautiful. There is no question in this case of individualistic taste and its disputability.<sup>28</sup> But, as Kant says, this judgment of taste is without a concept, which implies that this judgment cannot be proven right. For an intuition without a concept cannot be translated into general terms. There is a gap between the intuition and its articulation. The only thing we can do if others do not share our feelings is to tell them to "look again," and the hope is that their feelings shall speak for themselves. They will not be convinced by any concepts or reasons we adduce. They must give their assent only on the basis of their own feelings. Therein lies the truth of Ziff's statement that there are no competent observers as opposed to non-competent observers, and it is the truth behind Stevenson's theory that reasons in art criticism do not constrain, but guide.<sup>29</sup> In the judgment of taste we have aesthetic ideas, i.e., Kant explains, such rep-

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 25, 32-60.

<sup>29</sup> Ch. L. Stevenson, "Interpretation and Evaluation in Aesthetics," *Philosophical Analysis*, ed. by M. Black (Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell Univ. Press, 1950), 342 and 352; also in *Art and Philosophy* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1966<sup>3</sup> [1964<sup>1</sup>]), 438 and 490.

representations of the imagination<sup>30</sup> as give much material for thought but transcend the conceptual.<sup>31</sup> We can argue about them, but we shall never settle the question. Language cannot make those ideas fully understandable. Therefore, they are untranslatable.

But before making more of the consequences of Kant's statements, it might be well to turn first to his more positive description of the beautiful. Up to now, indeed, the definitions were rather negative. Beauty does not appeal to individualistic interests and is grasped without concepts. The positive indications (except the statement that beauty pleases universally) were borrowed from what is the background of Kant's definitions. There we saw that beauty harmonizes our mental powers, and that it has to do with the encounter of the two realms (the phenomenal and the noumenal), the subjective finality in nature. This doctrine becomes explicit in Kant's third description: "beauty is the form of purposiveness of an object, as far as this is perceived without any representation of a purpose."<sup>32</sup> This sentence might seem rather enigmatic (as are other sentences in Kant), but it is understandable against the background we referred to. The *a priori* of the judgment of taste in art, i.e., what makes possible the aesthetic "assessment," is the intuition of a subjective finality, that our mental powers are the aim and purpose of beauty. The purpose of beauty is to be perceived, in which perception we are harmonized, and come back to ourselves. Kant had already said that beauty essentially implies a relation to a subject which perceives it without there being a concept. There is finality, purposiveness, but there is no concept of a purpose. Beauty simply must please; it is not just a stage on the way to doing something else. It does not aim, but must be known. In Copleston's clear account of this passage

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<sup>30</sup> Not to be separated (as Sartre did and Merleau-Ponty did not) from perception. See e.g., E. F. Kaelin, *An Existentialist Aesthetic* (Madison, Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 368.

<sup>31</sup> I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Cf. note 23), 191-193.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

we are told to consider a beautiful rose.<sup>33</sup> We "may have the feeling that it is, as we say, just right," without imagining a purpose. This feeling can never be articulated in an adequate way. That is why the critic has no strict norms, and the religious believer not even words to express his feelings. The really great, the beautiful, does not have to be praised, but has to be admired in silence. Art criticism can sum up necessary conditions (the general and the stylistic norms), but it can never formulate sufficient ones; in this sense, beauty cannot be put under a rule or a standard. Here Kant is quite explicit.<sup>34</sup> To him functional beauty is only "adherent" instead of "free" beauty, by the simple fact that in the functional beauty of, for instance, a building, the concept of a purpose (and with it a rule for efficiency) comes in.<sup>35</sup> In terms of Strawson, who seems to lean heavily on Kant, we would say that the "properties" are interfering with the "features," and that the likes and dislikes begin to play a role in functioning art, or in art which in other ways is too close to our needs and interests.

Kant's fourth and last definition of beauty is that it is that which, without any concept, is recognized as the object of a necessary satisfaction.<sup>36</sup> This brings us back to our problem. On what does the universal validity of the aesthetic judgment of taste rest, if there is such an objective validity at all? There is no question here of a necessary foundation in the sense that the judgment of taste must be proved deductively to be true. The aesthetic judgment rests on subjective grounds which cannot be put adequately into words; there is no concept here. On the other hand the claim to validity is an aprioristic one, according to Kant, and therefore not to be proved by induction. The question of whether something

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<sup>33</sup> F. Copleston, S.J., *A History of Philosophy*, Vol. VI: *Wolff to Kant* (Westminster, Maryland, The Newman Press, 1960), 360. To my mind Copleston's account (which can be found on pages 180-392) is the best short introduction to Kant's philosophy. I gratefully made use of his commentary on the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 349-379.

<sup>34</sup> I. Kant, *op. cit.* 60-61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

is a work of art is not a matter of counting noses. Unanimity does not exist in this field. If it does exist (as seems to be the case with some works), its proof-value is on a lower kind than the universal validity and necessity we are looking for in our problem. Nor can we say that this necessity is a practical one, to use Kant's term, as if there could be general, objective laws or rules telling us how we ought to act in art. There are no general standards to measure the aesthetic, because it cannot even be formulated. The necessity of which Kant speaks in his fourth definition is, as he calls it, an exemplaristic one. The satisfaction which a person happens to feel is an example, an instance, of a universal rule which one cannot state but which requires the assent of all.<sup>37</sup>

But why, we must ask, should the experience of one man be a rule for all? This is the heart of our problem. But now we might be able to find the answer. The judgment of taste, we say, is possible through an *a priori* element, the sense of finality allows us to see the two realms (nature and value, phenomenal and noumenal) as connected. As a consequence, there is an interplay of the powers of imagination and understanding in regard to a given representation. This interplay arouses in us the pleasure which consists in our feeling ourselves harmonized in our mental powers. In this sense the aesthetic judgment rests on subjective grounds. Therefore the claim to universal validity is based on the assumption of the structural similarity of everybody's subjectivity. This, as a point of fact, is the answer of Kant.<sup>38</sup> In all men, he says, there are similar subjective conditions for judgment, a similarity which is shown by the fact that we are able to communicate with all. We are able to convey knowledge and to transfer representations, and how could this be possible without a similarity in the structure of the subjectivity of all men? So there must be a "common sense," says Kant.<sup>39</sup> In this expression, "common" has to be emphasized. The universal validity of the affirmation of beauty is rooted in the structure of

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-63.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 131 ff.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

subjectivity common to all men. Naturally, Kant is not blind to the fact that some people do not enjoy a product which is judged by others, and legitimately, as we may assume for the moment, to be a work of art. Kant's answer, however, is rather simple. They *should* enjoy it, because their receptivity has the same fundamental structure as that of other people. If they do not enjoy it, it is a pity. They still have to develop their receptivity. There are people who find music a kind of expensive noise. In fact they show a lack of education (or an organic defect). But this education they lack cannot be brought about by adducing concepts. The assent which is required in art is the result of a certain satisfaction which in the end is felt, and does not rest on concepts. The aesthetic is untranslatable, and can only be evoked; and the best way to evoke it is by showing it again and again, till, as we hope, the light goes on, and a disclosure arises.

As a matter of fact there has been much criticism of Kant's theory, but I am afraid that its critics do not understand him rightly. This is quite easy to explain. His writings are an example of esotericism and of carelessness concerning clarity in expression. But to call Kant's explanation "subjective," as H. Read does,<sup>40</sup> is confusing the two senses of subjective and is indicative of a pre-phenomenological mind. According to P. Ziff, Kant's assumption of a "common sense" is a kind of naïveté; and perhaps it is, but not in the sense intended by Ziff. "Reasoning about works of art," to quote Ziff's words, "is primarily a social affair, an attempt to build and map our common Eden; it can be carried on fruitfully only so long as there is either a common care or the possibility of one. But Kant was wrong in saying aesthetic judgments presuppose a common sense. One cannot sensibly presuppose what is often not the case. A community of interest and taste is not something given, but something that can be striven for."<sup>41</sup> Now we saw that Kant was aware of there being no unanimity. The common sense he speaks of is not something on the level of likes and dislikes, as he brought out rather clearly in explaining his

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<sup>40</sup> H. Read, *Art Now* (Cf. note 16), 27.

<sup>41</sup> P. Ziff, *Reasons in Art Criticism* (Cf. note 6), 619.

second definition of beauty. These likes and dislikes are only at the threshold of the aesthetic. But Kant's "common sense" is on that level which makes it possible that a community of interest "can be striven for" at all. How could we organize such a striving without there being a level on which human beings can communicate, dispute, learn from one another? This is the level Kant had in mind and which we meant when we spoke of the third and authentic level of aesthetic experience. Too often "taste" (or sensibility) is associated with the pre-aesthetic (the likes and dislikes), whereas in Kant's theory it refers to the really aesthetic which concerns man most deeply and is given with his existence, not in the sense that the authentic aesthetic experience takes place, but that it *can* take place.

This very assumption of a common structure of subjectivity, as distinguished from the level where human beings clearly differ from one another, has, however, to be justified. We will not endeavour to undertake such a justification. Philosophy of art may not take over the tasks of a philosophy of man; it presupposes and illuminates it. But it is interesting to see that such recent developments as the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss take the existence of a common structure of subjectivity as their central thesis, and we cannot do better than to refer to the literature of this trend. And studying it, one is apt to make another striking discovery, that according to Lévi-Strauss this identity of mental structure, this so-called "code", expresses itself in the universal human desire to organize the chaos in the world,<sup>42</sup> or what we called "to battle against the entropy in nature," to which art is a kind of compensation. Thus our theory seems to be confirmed in its most essential points.

#### AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND LOVE

Some persons, it is said, have so little respect for poetry that they write "poems" themselves. Perhaps something simi-

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<sup>42</sup> Both points, the common structure of subjectivity and the universal desire to organize, are so fundamental that they can be found in the short summary of Levi-Strauss' theory in *Time* (Asia ed.), 89 (June 30, 1967), 32-33.



lar is happening here, not in the sense that we are writing a poem, our account could hardly be more prosaic, but that we are leaping too carelessly to conclusions; and this as a matter of fact amounts to a lack of respect, both for philosophy and for art. But sometimes one has to leap, as in our case where an article has to perform the work normally assigned to a lengthy book. There are some points, nevertheless, which even within the limited space of an article demand closer attention, some difficulties which, when not solved or at least recognized, influence thought in a hidden way, but efficiently enough to prevent one from giving his approval. Thus it would seem to be going too far if one had to accept, as a conclusion of the theory exposed above, that artistic products made in Zulu tribes are equally art objects for Eskimos. But why should this be strange? There are Europeans who have a taste for both. The surprise comes (perhaps unconsciously) from the assumption that Eskimos do not know enough about the Zulu way of life. Once they know enough, I see no difficulty in their enjoying Zulu works of art, exactly in the same way that we enjoy the works of the Etruscans. The only thing needed is a certain amount of education. Or are we here at the true source of the astonishment? If art is something so deeply human, why is there any need for education in order to experience art as it should be experienced?

Perhaps the best way to meet this difficulty is to answer, as Jesuits sometimes do, with a counter-question. If love is something deeply human (and it is), why is there any need for education towards love? The parallel goes further than might seem at first sight. Love is not the same as sympathy; we are responsible for the former, but not for the latter. The former belongs to the sphere of human freedom, the second to that of the spontaneous likes and dislikes, given with the (partly biophysical) structure of the individual. There can be love for a person we dislike, and the likes or sympathy may help to raise love. In art the situation is very similar. Art education is already well on the way when it makes clear the distinction between likes (dislikes) and aesthetic experience. Love for a person depends greatly on the place we assign him

in our world. The relation however between reasons for loving and love itself are not logical but causal or conditional; they do not constrain, but guide. The same is true in art appreciation. The inverse is enlightening, too. Aesthetic experience is said to be disinterested, to cause satisfaction without reference to desire. This phenomenon likewise holds true for love. It is that which is called "unselfishness." In art an ordering takes place which re-establishes the world, and in this way remedies the frustration caused by submitting all things to one's own interests and aims. The same applies to love which helps the other to be himself, to be the other, and in so doing, the lover at the same time becomes himself, discovers that the other is not a stranger and acquires that openness which is the very condition of psychic health. Art and love both create a world, the world of "findige Tiere," as R. M. Rilke called the lovers. All looks new from then on, and the most simple gestures become pregnant with meaning. It is to this, too, that the statement refers that in both art and love thought is made visible without a concept (who could express what exactly the other means to oneself?). Beauty, as Kant puts it, is directed towards me; there is a purposiveness perceived without any representation of a purpose. Lovers, too, feel this (mutual) finality and call it the "fulfillment" which "harmonizes" them. No need of saying that this experience, as that of art, is worthwhile for its own sake. "It is good for us to be here." And nothing could excite or enrage lovers more than to be told that their feelings, their love, might not claim universality ("you think the other is worth loving, but in fact he is not"). The other, like the work of art, is "recognized as the object of a necessary satisfaction," not by an objective necessity (not by deduction for the reasons do not constrain; not by induction, for not everybody loves the one I love), nor by a practical one (it is not the mere result of a law telling us how we ought to act), but by an exemplary necessity in the sense in which we used it previously.

But with all this the situation doesn't seem to have improved. On the contrary. If all that the philosophers were able to say about the most strictly aesthetic level in art experience applied equally well (or almost equally) to the relation-

ship of love, then they did not succeed in describing the aesthetic in an adequate way. And the conclusion drawn from this empty description of the aesthetic—namely the objectivity of the judgment of taste—would seem to be as empty as it. For this objectivity is *de iure* more than *de facto*, and does not help us in the problem we are trying to cope with,—i.e., how to know whether a given product is a work of art. The objectivity we found implies that if someone is right in affirming such a work, he is universally right, that is, right for all. But it does not tell us *who* is right in such an affirmation. And this question is urgent. Critics often quarrel over certain works, which implies that the aesthetic experience one critic feels is judged to be para-aesthetical by another critic. And this means that we still don't know how to distinguish them.

#### ART AND DISCLOSURES

The situation is actually less alarming than it seems. The description of a deeply human experience can never be adequate. Such experiences always go further than the observable and purely "objective." They do not even have to be very deep. They need only involve a person's subjectivity. This experience already has its start, as Bertrand Russell points out, when we learn to read. We spell "c-a-t" until "it clicks:" "cat!"<sup>43</sup> If we were to describe what this "clicking" means, we would get into trouble. How did we become aware of a "circle" as a result of the exercise which consists in increasing indefinitely the number of sides of a regular polygon? What is it like, to see the point in a metaphor? In such moments we always seem to go further than the actually given, like children do who discover the pattern in their drawing-book where only a few points (which still have to be connected to each other) are given. Some children need the help of many more points between the given ones. Some do not, all depending on the measure of their "sensibility" (which can be developed). In a similar way we discover the other as a "person" in situations where he reveals his name to us, or when we recognize him as

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. I. T. Ramsey, *Religious Language. An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrase*. (New York, Macmillan Paperbacks, 1963), 62.

an old friend in the crowd in an official reception. The empirical basis might be minimal, as McTaggart pointed out long ago. Even nicknames have this evoking force. "Greasy Bear" falls short as a description of the director of an oil-refinery, but it is an indication of what he means to his children who call him by this name, for to them he is more than just a professional man. This inadequacy, this falling-short of language is clearest in a person's "I-awareness," in his confrontation with himself (for instance, when he faces a duty), when he discovers his subjectivity as transcending all that objective descriptions could possibly say.

What all these situations have in common is that they start from observable data to evoke an insight that goes beyond these data, an insight that has to be spoken of in a language which, in reference to the generating language, is rather odd. In his inimitable way the Bishop of Durham, formerly Nolloth professor at Oxford, explained this phenomenon as disclosure-situations,<sup>44</sup> i.e., situations that include observables *and more*. Many language games are rooted in such situations and can make sense only if understood in this light. The words used may be the same as those used in other contexts, and grammatically there will be strict identity. But no "logical" structure will be rightly assigned to such phrases unless it grounds them in a disclosure-situation. Their very similarity with "ordinary" phrases, however, can make us unaware of this necessity, and lead us to the fallacy of flat reading. "Mary went up to heaven" is then understood as being on the same level with "Mary went to the kitchen," and the "last things" becomes parallel to "the last train." In fact, those common words, used in religious language, are models meant to evoke a disclosure, and they help articulate the intuition once the disclosure has occurred. Sometimes this evoking function is indicated by a special operator or qualifier (as in *all-mighty*), but at other times it is not, and then the danger of forgetting its function becomes rather imminent. Only few people realize, for instance, that in (classical) physics such words as "energy"

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<sup>44</sup> For a more detailed account, see my article "Sense and Nonsense in Talking about God," *Saint Louis Quarterly*, 5 (1968), n. 1 (in the press), which is an exposition and evaluation of Ramsey's ideas.

and "force" are used in this way. To Newton "force" meant what is "seen" in a disclosure when one observes discontinuity in motion. In psychology we know such disclosure-words as "disposition," "intention," and "decision." In geography such a word is "climate" perhaps, as distinct from weather. In linguistics an example could be the "feel" for the language, which is more than merely knowing its syntax and accent.<sup>45</sup> Our impression is, then, that the language of art criticism should be understood in the same way. The terms it uses (like "unity," "tension," or "mass") are models which found this language game on empirical facts. But they bear a qualifier, which is not expressed, but provided nevertheless by the aesthetic context, a built-in stimulus to develop the story until it opens up and the light goes on. In this sense we speak of a painting "coming alive." There will be no new language available for him who has had this intuition or disclosure, but he will be strongly aware of the inadequacy or oddness of the language he continues to use. He will be aware, at bottom, of the impossibility of articulating completely or of making discursive that which is given only in intuition. There is no conveying an art experience in a straight-forward descriptive way; the justification of the aesthetic judgment always is an appeal to terms used outside of the aesthetic, and can work only through the contagious lucidity of the individual experience.

But if this is true, and the disclosure-conception of art experience will be acceptable especially for those who are acquainted with Lalo's theory of infra-and supra-structure, it is no wonder that in the articulation of the artistic experience so many references are found, as we indicated, to love. Love, indeed, is the paradigm of all disclosure situations;<sup>46</sup> it is the most personal attitude, it transcends all public behavior which it however includes. It might be described in different ways (as St. Paul did in I Cor. 13), but the last word is only that it is "the greatest." Love can never be verified, because it cannot be expressed in object-stories (who guarantees the motive of behavior?) R. M. Rilke pointed to the world of art as

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<sup>45</sup> I. T. Ramsey, *Models and Mystery* (London, Oxford University Press, 1964), 62; *Religious Language*, 47-48.

<sup>46</sup> *Freedom and Immortality* (London, S.C.M., 1960), 131-132.

being a world of lovers, and impressionistic critics often compared art and love (to conclude, as we would not, that art is a higher feeling).

If it is true, then, that art experience has to be located within a disclosure-situation, many problems seem to be clarified at the same time. Thus it becomes clear that art descriptions, given by critics, are a sort of crypto-imperative. When the critic says "This work of art is unified" he means, according to Stevenson,<sup>47</sup> that the work of art appears unified when observed in the way that *is to be* cultivated. Terms with disclosure power, indeed, like all models or symbols, bear in themselves a built-in stimulus, an imperative, to develop and contextualize the terms towards a disclosure. But at the same time they are more than imperatives, because they point to "something" objective, to that which is discovered when the disclosure comes about, and which by the same terms has to be articulated after the disclosure happens. The language of aesthetics, therefore, is neither purely descriptive nor purely emotive; to hold the contrary would be the aesthetic counterpart of Hare's "blik-theory" in theology (*cfr.* Paul van Buren). Aesthetic language is evocatively descriptive. It does not describe flatly "how things are" but *suggests* how they are.

At the same time it becomes understandable why art experience, although so deeply human, presupposes education and sensibility. Disclosure situations always presuppose someone who is able to perceive the disclosure-value of what is "given."

The disclosure theory also throws some light on the ever disputed problem of the relation between art and natural beauty. I would suggest that "natural beauty" refers to a self-disclosing power of nature. Earth (to use Heidegger's term) appears here so strikingly that it establishes itself in its own rights; nature "takes on depth." Art has to serve this self-appearance. That is why art is invoked "to teach us how to look." That was the point, too, of scholastic philosophy which connected beauty with the truth of being and with good-

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<sup>47</sup> Ch. L. Stevenson, *Interpretation and Evaluation in Aesthetics* (Cf. note 29), esp. 349 and 488.

ness (the harmonizing power of which can be traced back to the Pythagorean theory of art).

Even Kant's antinomy of the judgment of taste<sup>48</sup> can be explained in terms of disclosure and models. Kant's thesis runs thus: "The judgment of taste is not based upon concepts; for otherwise it would admit of dispute (would be determinable by proofs)". The antithesis is: "The judgment of taste is based upon concepts; for otherwise, in spite of its diversity, we could not quarrel about it (we could not claim the necessary assent of others for our judgment)". Kant's solution is that in the thesis, "concept" stands for "determinate concept," and in the antithesis, for "indeterminate concept." And he adds that the indeterminate concept is that of the supra-sensible substrata of phenomena. Now instead of speaking about "substrata" and "indeterminate concepts," it seems more fitting to speak of language being fed back into a disclosure situation, a language, therefore, which refers to objects *and more* ("the suprasensible substratum"), and which by this very fact cannot be purely descriptive or open to "objective" proofs, although it has enough empirical basis to make a certain amount of communication possible.

Where it is said (as Aiken does<sup>49</sup>) that "aesthetic experience is perhaps best understood on the model of those consummatory response patterns which pass above the threshold of consciousness," I would answer that mystery is present whenever there is a disclosure situation (whereby "mystery" is understood as that which is hidden from all flat descriptions).

The model (or symbol), insofar as it is itself given in a disclosure, might be of help in explaining another phenomenon, that of the artistic inspiration.

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<sup>48</sup> I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (Cf. note 23), 234.

<sup>49</sup> H. D. Aiken, "Some Notes Concerning the Aesthetic and the Cognitive," *Aesthetics Today: Readings selected*, edited, and introduced by M. Philipson (Cleveland and New York, The World Publishing Company, 1961), 272. The article is a reprint from *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 13 (1955), n. 3.

Reference is once again made to disclosure situations when it is stated that reasons in art criticism do not constrain, but guide. A disclosure does not arrive on command. One can only invite another to look again and again, in the hope that he may have the experience we call the "light goes on," but the light will not always go on. When it does, the observer (or listener, etc.) has perceived the sensible given in its model character. Or perhaps it is better to speak of "sign-value" or "symbolism." "Model" indeed stems from a scientific context and implies rather indirect contact with reality, since it is the result of an explanatory hypothesis which has to be verified by a test of empirical fit. The relation of art to reality seems to be more direct and has more of the self-justifying character of a symbol.

#### STYLIZATION AND PSYCHICAL DISTANCE

Both ways of speaking, that of models and that of symbols, can be of help in coming to grips with the more essential issues of our problem. Thus a distinction has been made throughout this article between the strictly individual and the more commonly human. This distinction has been made to locate the strictly aesthetic and to back up the claim that if a product is a work of art, everybody should experience it as such, notwithstanding the fact that many people do not. This phenomenon can be explained in terms of models or symbols. For although the receptivity for disclosures, the ability to arrive at insights, is indeed common to all human beings, the receptivity for the concrete models or symbols by which the disclosure has to be evoked is different from individual to individual. Art education aims at improving this receptivity in a twofold way, taking into consideration that the lack of receptivity for the concrete symbols may have been caused either by ignorance concerning their origin and function, or by the influence exercised on the individual by his likes and dislikes. The education needed in the first case is that sort of instruction which is conveyed by art history and the so-called "form studies." The second case might be approached by pointing to a characteristic which pertains to the essence of art-stylization. It has to be pointed out that art is not



just a duplicate of life and nature. Perhaps a film may seem to be the most faithful imitation of life. But if we look closer we will see that here, too, a strong selection of natural elements takes place. Thus Satyajit Ray, asked why film is an art,<sup>50</sup> replied that it is because of its stylization. There is the selection of a frame, given by the very fact that one makes use of a camera. There is selection in the cutting of the images. There is the composition of sound and images. And the aim of these, he said, is to make the natural elements selected *evoke* nature.

But why, one might ask, is it necessary to select natural elements in order to evoke nature? Can nature not speak for itself? Is life not the best story? It surely is, but we are not always able to perceive it. If we do perceive it, we have the experience of what we call "natural beauty." Nature (or life) appears then in its own right. But often we do not perceive in this manner, because of a lack of "psychical distance." This term, coined by E. Bullough, could serve to explain the function of stylization and of empathy at the same time. Distance, he says, "is obtained by separating the object and its appeal from one's own self, by putting it out of gear with practical needs and ends," and in doing this "distance provides the much needed criterion of the beautiful as distinct from the merely agreeable."<sup>51</sup> It does not need much perspicacity to see that in Bullough's conception, too, the beautiful has to be distinguished from the individually limited domain of the likes and dislikes. "Loss of distance . . . means loss of aesthetic appreciation."<sup>52</sup> The subject (the observer or listener) is always exposed to the danger of "under-distancing." Thus "explicit references to organic affections, to the material existence of the body, especially to sexual matters, normally lie below the distance-limits, and can be touched upon by art only with special precaution."<sup>53</sup> (We would say through stylization.)

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<sup>50</sup> During a conference held at the Loyola House of Studies Ateneo de Manila, 1 September 1967.

<sup>51</sup> E. Bullough, "'Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and an Aesthetic Principle," *Art and Philosophy*, cf. note 19, 536-537.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

The same applies to topics of very actual discussions (e.g., of ethical or social matters) treated by an artist. I think indeed that the working of what Strawson called the "properties" has to be neutralized in order to experience aesthetically. One has to move some distance from one's likes and dislikes, to become "disinterested," in order that nature can appear in its own rights. It is the function of stylization (or of what Merleau-Ponty so strikingly called "*une déformation cohérente*"<sup>54</sup>) to create this necessary distance. This transformation must dissolve our daily attitude of "oblivion of being," our custom of putting nature at the service of our needs. The work of art, by being stylized and in this sense "anti-realistic,"<sup>55</sup> must sharpen our sense of reality. But at the same time it has to avoid "over-distancing." This "antinomy of the distance" is the very condition of empathy, that feeling of being detached and yet involved.

Translated in terms of disclosures, "stylization" aims at warning us against the "flat reading" of the symbols. A still life does not just present apples as they are shown in the window of a grocery. Art is the arrangement of elements in such a way that they acquire a disclosure-evoking power. But they do not acquire this power if the observer concentrates only on his own needs and interests. For in that case the observer sticks only to the realm of observables, flatly describable in terms of calories and the secretion of saliva. Looking "at the belly of a Titian nude" he will see only the naked, for the naked is the nude without its disclosure power. By transforming the elements, the artist helps to create the distance needed and in doing so, he "suppresses the directly personal element of individualism."<sup>56</sup> But he cannot do the entire job. The observer has to cooperate with him.

#### RELIABILITY OF JUDGMENTS OF TASTE

Thus there are several explanations as to why a work of art will not always be experienced as such although it should

<sup>54</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, 68 and 97, (Cf. note 14).

<sup>55</sup> E. Bullough, *op. cit.*, 544.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 551.

be. The claim to be aesthetic is indeed universal (given the similarity of everybody's subjectivity), but it cannot always exert its influence, because of lack of knowledge concerning the symbols used ("the language of the work of art has to be learned"), or because of the lack of distance on the part of the observer. The absence of aesthetic experience in some people is no objection, therefore, to the objectivity of the judgment of taste stating that the product in question is a work of art. That the critic, pronouncing this judgment of taste, cannot convince the others of the objectivity of his experience, is a rather normal case. One can be pretty sure of a disclosure he has, but the articulation of that which is "seen" in the disclosure is always hazardous, exposed to errors and doomed to incompleteness. Disclosure-language points to something objective without being able to describe it. In a certain sense, faith will always remain the same and rest on a disclosure. The believer is sure of God, but his articulation, i.e., theology, will always be very tentative. The same applies to mathematics. When someone draws several circles of increasing circumferences with their centers on a straight line, he will "see" (in a disclosure) that the proportion of the circumferences to their diameters is constant. But the articulation of this insight is very tentative indeed. It is done by speaking of "pi," that is, at the price of a repeated fraction  $3.14159\dots$ <sup>57</sup> The reason is that there is always a logical gap between the model (symbol) and that in which it finds its fulfillment. The aesthetic appreciation has to be communicated by articulating it in non-aesthetic terms, which means that it cannot be communicated at all. Likewise the love for a friend cannot be explained sufficiently, because the disclosure of his loveliness goes further than the observables, whereas the articulation, taken precisely in its purely descriptive force, does not.

The problem is more acute, however, in the inverse case, where someone thinks he has an aesthetic experience whereas in fact there is no work of art, only *Ersatz* and self-deception. We all know this phenomenon of the para-aesthetic, for in-

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<sup>57</sup> I. T. Ramsey, *Freedom and Immortality* (London, S.C.M., 1960), 114; *On Being Sure in Religion* (London, Univ. of London Press, 1963), 23.

stance in the cast of certain religious representations. People (except some bachelors) are deeply moved by the wedding-march of Lohengrin, but is this reaction aesthetic? There are indeed para-aesthetic experiences, and it is not difficult to explain why they are so often taken for the authentically aesthetic. Disclosures may come about by several means (by different models), and precisely because that which is disclosed cannot be articulated adequately (for it goes beyond what can be described in terms of the purely observable), the difference between one disclosure (the para-aesthetic) and the other (aesthetic) cannot be made completely clear. The Lohengrin "evokes the world" of loving people, and the perception of its tones is a pleasure "for its own sake." This might be in virtue of its being a work of art, but more probably it "works" in virtue of certain associations which are on another level.

There indeed the problem is at its most acute. Up to now it was rather easy to distinguish between the individualistic<sup>58</sup> realm (of needs and likes) and the commonly human (to which the aesthetic appeals). But there are needs and likes which are almost universally shared by human beings. It is impossible, then, to unmask the artifact which, though not a work of art, has properties that appeal to an almost universal need, and happens at the same time to possess (in force of associations) a power to evoke a disclosure very similar to those generated by a real work of art. Normally the objectivity of disclosures can be argued by placing them within the context of a multi-model discourse and by the test of empirical fit, where what has been disclosed is found to be congruent with and illuminative of the experience in the domain in question. But this method does not seem to apply to our case. There is in art criticism something analogous to the requirement of augmenting the models for the sake of their mutual checking. It is the claim that the critic must be coherent in the application of his norms. But this brings us back again to the norms which, as we saw, are either not aesthetic

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<sup>58</sup> Although it is not so individualistic as to be limited to one single person. We pointed this out in the beginning of this article where we explained the generality of the first and second norms, *i.e.*, those founded on the shareable "properties."

or not general, and are never decisive. They only formulate necessary conditions as opposed to sufficient ones.

It becomes more understandable why philosophy of art usually takes as its starting point works of art which are generally recognized as such, and therefore belonging to an earlier age. But this very fact may guide us towards a solution for our problem. Behind such a philosophy of art lies the conviction that artifacts recognized as works of art by so many people and for so long a period of time must be real works of art. This is an act of confidence which might be extended as to its object. It does not seem unreasonable, indeed, to accept as valid a judgment of taste, shared by all or most critics, that a given contemporary product is a work of art. If there is no unanimity the probability decreases accordingly. For something is a work of art, if and only if, it provokes an aesthetic experience, and the critic might be supposed to be among the first to have this experience, or at least among the first to make it explicit. He is the one who by profession must be acquainted with the various models or symbols used, and we saw that one of the reasons why a work of art does not cause aesthetic experience in all persons is the lack of this kind of acquaintance. The critic is the one, too, who is the most aware of stylization which activates the sensibility to art. The receptivity for disclosures and its models is raised, indeed, by the psychical distance which neutralizes (more or less) the influence exercised by the rather individualistic likes and dislikes. He ought to be the one, at least, who tries to discover and unmask this influence, first of all in himself. He will ask himself which extra-aesthetic motives play a part in his appreciation, and this examination will surely bear fruit.

It is by participation in the critic's qualities that other persons may trust their aesthetic decisions, and the more people agree with the positive judgments of critics, the more moral certainty there will be, or at least probability. It follows from all the foregoing that those who in this case do not feel an aesthetic experience have much which counters the validity of their own judgment. But the case becomes different where one judges a work to be a work of art whereas critics don't. It

might be the case that the receptivity of a non-professional is purer than that of a critic. For though education can be a help, it can sometimes make a person prejudiced. In this case the person in question is advised to make a self-examination of the possible influence of likes and dislikes, as we mentioned earlier.

So the certainty and objectivity of the judgment of taste is a question of weighing one against the other. The more critics converge in affirming the artistic value of a given work, the better it is. In the negative case one has to be more careful. It might be that the work still has to be discovered, that its language still has to be learned (the artist must create his public).

Thus in the last resort it might seem that the decision about a given work is a question of counting noses. But it is not entirely so. Apart from the value of the efficient (at least to some extent) self-examination there are the considerations as to the decision *which* noses one should count. Because, for all the reasons given above, I believe in qualified noses. They do not always belong to critics (especially not in the case when they judge negatively), but most of the time they do. It is often said that critics failed in the past; but this was mostly the case when their judgments were negative (and I suspect that there were not many non-professionals at the time who pronounced more positive judgments). As the situation presents itself in our own time the critics are much more positive than the ordinary public, and it appears to be a wise course to follow the critics. This act of faith, for the rest of us is not absolute. One has to look and to look again in the hope that in us, too, the light will go on.

Although much more clarification is needed, the problem of the objectivity of the judgment of taste has been explained and clarified, I hope, even if only to a modest degree. The problem has not been solved, neither by me, nor, as far as I know, by others. The demand that philosophy should solve all problems has its basis in the conviction that life is without problems, a conviction which is rather naive. It is better, then,

to state explicitly the assumptions from which a philosophy of contemporary art has to start—the structural similarity of human subjectivity and a certain amount of trust in the competence of critics. A valid judgment of taste is universally valid, but it is difficult to be precise about that judgment. The help of critics is then needed; if they agree, all the better. If not, the future must give more certainty. A rather insignificant conclusion, indeed. This is perhaps, to use a comment of Friedrich Waisman, the fate of philosophy that it start with platitudes and end with them, but the way in between is well worth traversing.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> There are other sources not mentioned in our article. Of the more recent publications, we might mention St. Morawski's "On the Objectivity of the Aesthetic Judgment," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 6 (1966), 315-328. I did not have enough time to acquire a copy of this issue.