

## Aesthetic As Science of Expression and General Linguistic

Benedetto Croce  
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## I. Intuition and Expression

Human knowledge has two forms: it is either intuitive knowledge or logical knowledge; knowledge obtained through the imagination or knowledge obtained through the intellect; knowledge of the individual or knowledge of the universal; of individual things or of the relations between them: it is, in fact, productive either of images or of concepts.

*Intuitive knowledge.*

In ordinary life, constant appeal is made to intuitive knowledge. It is said to be impossible to give expression to certain truths; that they are not demonstrable by syllogisms; that they must be learnt intuitively. The politician finds fault with the abstract reasoner, who is without a lively knowledge of actual conditions; the pedagogue insists upon the necessity of developing the intuitive faculty in the pupil before everything else; the critic in judging a work of art makes it a point of honour to set aside theory and abstractions, and to judge it by direct intuition; the practical man professes to live rather by intuition than by reason.

But this ample acknowledgment, granted to intuitive knowledge in ordinary life, does not meet with an equal and adequate acknowledgment in the field of theory and of philosophy. There exists a very ancient science of intellective knowledge, admitted by all without discussion, namely, Logic; but a science of intuitive knowledge is timidly and with difficulty admitted by but a few. Logical knowledge has appropriated the lion's share; and if she does not quite slay and devour her companion, yet yields to her with difficulty the humble little place of maidservant or doorkeeper. What, it says, is intuitive knowledge without the light of intellective knowledge? It is a servant without a master; and though a master find a servant useful, the master is a necessity to the servant, since he enables him to gain his livelihood. Intuition is blind; Intellect lends her eyes.

Now, the first point to be firmly fixed in the mind is that intuitive knowledge has no need of a master, nor to lean upon any one; she does not need to borrow the eyes of others, for she has most excellent eyes of her own. Doubtless it is possible to find concepts mingled with intuitions. But in many other intuitions there is no trace of such a mixture, which proves that it is not necessary. The impression of a moonlight scene by a painter; the outline of a country drawn by a cartographer;

*Its independence in respect to intellective knowledge.*

a musical motive, tender or energetic; the words of a sighing lyric, or those with which we ask, command and lament in ordinary life, may well all be intuitive facts without a shadow of intellective relation. But, think what one may of these instances, and admitting further that one may maintain that the greater part of the intuitions of civilized man are impregnated with concepts, there yet remains to be observed something more important and more conclusive. Those concepts which are found mingled and fused with the intuitions, are no longer concepts, in so far as they are really mingled and fused, for they have lost all independence and autonomy. They have been concepts, but they have now become simple elements of intuition. The philosophical maxims placed in the mouth of a personage of tragedy or of comedy, perform there the function, not of concepts, but of characteristics of such personage; in the same way as the red in a painted figure does not there represent the red colour of the physicists, but is a characteristic element of the portrait. The whole it is that determines the quality of the parts. A work of art may be full of philosophical concepts; it may contain them in greater abundance and they may be there even more profound than in a philosophical dissertation, which in its turn may be rich to overflowing with descriptions and intuitions. But, notwithstanding all these concepts it may contain, the result of the work of art is an intuition; and notwithstanding all those intuitions, the result of the philosophical dissertation is a concept. The *Promessi Sposi* contains copious ethical observations and distinctions, but it does not for that reason lose in its total effect its character of simple story, of intuition. In like manner the anecdotes and satirical effusions which may be found in the works of a philosopher like Schopenhauer, do not remove from those works their character of intellective treatises. The difference between a scientific work and a work of art, that is, between an intellective fact and an intuitive fact lies in the result, in the diverse effect aimed at by their respective authors. This it is that determines and rules over the several parts of each.

But to admit the independence of intuition as regards concept does not suffice to give a true and precise idea of intuition. Another error arises among those who recognize this, or who, at any rate, do not make intuition explicitly dependent upon the intellect. This error obscures and confounds the real nature of intuition. By intuition is frequently understood the perception or knowledge of actual reality, the apprehension of something as *real*.

*Intuition and perception.*

Certainly perception is intuition: the perception of the room in which I am writing, of the ink-bottle and paper that are before me, of the pen I am using, of the objects that I touch and make use of as instruments of my person, which, if it write, therefore exists; — these are all intuitions. But the image that is now passing through my brain of a me writing in another room, in another town, with different paper, pen and ink, is also an intuition. This means that the distinction between reality and non-

reality is extraneous, secondary, to the true nature of intuition. If we assume the existence of a human mind which should have intuitions for the first time, it would seem that it could have intuitions of effective reality only, that is to say, that it could have perceptions of nothing but the real. But if the knowledge of reality be based upon the distinction between real images and unreal images, and if this distinction does not originally exist, these intuitions would in truth not be intuitions either of the real or of the unreal, but pure intuitions. Where all is real, nothing is real. The child, with its difficulty of distinguishing true from false, history from fable, which are all one to childhood, can furnish us with a sort of very vague and only remotely approximate idea of this ingenuous state. Intuition is the indifferenced unity of the perception of the real and of the simple image of the possible. In our intuitions we do not oppose ourselves to external reality as empirical beings, but we simply objectify our impressions, whatever they be.

Those, therefore, who look upon intuition as sensation formed and arranged simply according to the categories of space and time, would seem to approximate more nearly to the truth. Space and time (they say) are the forms of intuition; to have intuitions is to place in space and in temporal sequence. Intuitive activity would then consist in this double and concurrent function of spatiality and temporality. But for these two categories must be repeated what was said of intellectual distinctions, found mingled with intuitions. We have intuitions without space and without time: a tint of sky and a tint of sentiment, an Ah! of pain and an effort of will, objectified in consciousness. These are intuitions, which we possess, and with their making, space and time have nothing to do. In some intuitions, spatiality may be found without temporality, in others, this without that; and even where both are found, they are perceived by posterior reflexion: they can be fused with the intuition in like manner with all its other elements: that is, they are in it *materialiter* and not *formaliter*, as ingredients and not as essentials. Who, without a similar act of interruptive reflexion, is conscious of temporal sequence while listening to a story or a piece of music? That which intuition reveals in a work of art is not space and time, but character, individual physiognomy. Several attempts may be noted in modern philosophy, which confirm the view here exposed. Space and time, far from being very simple and primitive functions, are shown to be intellectual constructions of great complexity. And further, even in some of those who do not altogether deny to space and time the quality of forming or of categories and functions, one may observe the attempt to unify and to understand them in a different manner from that generally maintained in respect of these categories. Some reduce intuition to the unique category of spatiality, maintaining that time also can only be conceived in terms of space. Others abandon the three dimensions of space as not philosophically necessary,

*Intuition and the concepts of space and time.*

and conceive the function of spatiality as void of every particular spatial determination. But what could such a spatial function be, that should control even time? May it not be a residuum of criticisms and of negations from which arises merely the necessity to posit a generic intuitive activity? And is not this last truly determined, when one unique function is attributed to it, not spatializing nor temporalizing, but characterizing? Or, better, when this is conceived as itself a category or function, which gives knowledge of things in their concretion and individuality?

Having thus freed intuitive knowledge from any suggestion of intellectualism and from every posterior and external adjunct, we must now make clear and determine its limits from another side and from a different kind of invasion and confusion. On the other side, and before the inferior boundary, is sensation, formless matter, which the spirit can never apprehend in itself, in so far as it is mere matter. This it can only possess with form and in form, but postulates its concept as, precisely, a limit. Matter, in its abstraction, is mechanism, passivity; it is what the spirit of man experiences, but does not produce. Without it no human knowledge and activity is possible; but mere matter produces animality, whatever is brutal and impulsive in man, not the spiritual dominion, which is humanity. How often do we strive to understand clearly what is passing within us? We do catch a glimpse of something, but this does not appear to the mind as objectified and formed. In such moments it is, that we best perceive the profound difference between matter and form. These are not two acts of ours, face to face with one another; but we assault and carry off the one that is outside us, while that within us tends to absorb and make its own that without. Matter, attacked and conquered by form, gives place to concrete form. It is the matter, the content, that differentiates one of our intuitions from another: form is constant: it is spiritual activity, while matter is changeable. Without matter, however, our spiritual activity would not leave its abstraction to become concrete and real, this or that spiritual content, this or that definite intuition.

It is a curious fact, characteristic of our times, that this very form, this very activity of the spirit, which is essentially ourselves, is so easily ignored or denied. Some confound the spiritual activity of man with the metaphorical and mythological activity of so-called nature, which is mechanism and has no resemblance to human activity, save when we imagine, with Aesop, that *arbores loquuntur non tantum ferae*. Some even affirm that they have never observed in themselves this “miraculous” activity, as though there were no difference, or only one of quantity, between sweating and thinking, feeling cold and the energy of the will. Others, certainly with greater reason, desire to unify activity and mechanism in a more general concept, though admitting that they are specifically distinct. Let us, however, refrain for the moment from examining if such a unification be possible, and in what sense, but admitting

that the attempt may be made, it is clear that to unify two concepts in a third implies a difference between the two first. And here it is this difference that is of importance and we set it in relief.

Intuition has often been confounded with simple sensation. But, since this confusion is too shocking to good sense, it has more frequently been attenuated or concealed with a phraseology which seems to wish to confuse and to distinguish them at the same time. Thus, it has been asserted that intuition is sensation, but not so much simple sensation as *association* of sensations. The equivocal arises precisely from the word "association." Association is understood, either as memory, mnemonic association, conscious recollection, and in that case is evident the absurdity of wishing to join together in memory elements which are not intuified, distinguished, possessed in some way by the spirit and produced by consciousness: or it is understood as association of unconscious elements. In this case we remain in the world of sensation and of nature. Further, if with certain associationists we speak of an association which is neither memory nor flux of sensations, but is a *productive* association (formative, constructive, distinguishing); then we admit the thing itself and deny only its name. In truth, productive association is no longer association in the sense of the sensualists, but *synthesis*, that is to say, spiritual activity. Synthesis may be called association; but with the concept of productivity is already posited the distinction between passivity and activity, between sensation and intuition.

Other psychologists are disposed to distinguish from sensation something which is sensation no longer, but is not yet intellectual concept: *the representation or image*. What is the difference between their representation or image, and our intuitive knowledge? The greatest, and none at all. "Representation," too, is a very equivocal word. If by representation be understood something detached and standing out from the psychic base of the sensations, then representation is intuition. If, on the other hand, it be conceived as a complex sensation, a return is made to simple sensation, which does not change its quality according to its richness or poverty, operating alike in a rudimentary or in a developed organism full of traces of past sensations. Nor is the equivocal remedied by defining representation as a psychic product of secondary order in relation to sensation, which should occupy the first place. What does secondary order mean here? Does it mean a qualitative, a formal difference? If so, we agree: representation is elaboration of sensation, it is intuition. Or does it mean greater complexity and complication, a quantitative, material difference? In that case intuition would be again confused with simple sensation.

And yet there is a sure method of distinguishing true intuition, true representation, from that which is inferior to it: the spiritual fact from the mechanical, pas-

*Intuition and association.*

*Intuition and representation.*

*Intuition and expression.*

sive, natural fact. Every true intuition or representation is, also, *expression*. That which does not objectify itself in expression is not intuition or representation, but sensation and naturality. The spirit does not obtain intuitions, otherwise than by making, forming, expressing. He who separates intuition from expression never succeeds in reuniting them.

*Intuitive activity possesses intuitions to the extent that it expresses them.* — Should this expression seem at first paradoxical, that is chiefly because, as a general rule, a too restricted meaning is given to the word "expression." It is generally thought of as restricted to verbal expression. But there exist also non-verbal expressions, such as those of line, colour, and sound; to all of these must be extended our affirmation. The intuition and expression together of a painter are pictorial; those of a poet are verbal. But be it pictorial, or verbal, or musical, or whatever else it be called, to no intuition can expression be wanting, because it is an inseparable part of intuition. How can we possess a true intuition of a geometrical figure, unless we possess so accurate an image of it as to be able to trace it immediately upon paper or on a slate? How can we have an intuition of the contour of a region, for example, of the island of Sicily, if we are not able to draw it as it is in all its meanderings? Every one can experience the internal illumination which follows upon his success in formulating to himself his impressions and sentiments, but only so far as he is able to formulate them. Sentiments or impressions, then, pass by means of words from the obscure region of the soul into the clarity of the contemplative spirit. In this cognitive process it is impossible to distinguish intuition from expression. The one is produced with the other at the same instant, because they are not two, but one.

The principal reason which makes our theme appear paradoxical as we maintain it, is the illusion or prejudice that we possess a more complete intuition of reality than we really do. One often hears people say that they have in their minds many important thoughts, but that they are not able to express them. In truth, if they really had them, they would have coined them into beautiful, ringing words, and thus expressed them. If these thoughts seem to vanish or to become scarce and poor in the act of expressing them, either they did not exist or they really were scarce and poor. People think that all of us ordinary men imagine and have intuitions of countries, figures and scenes, like painters; of bodies, like sculptors; save that painters and sculptors know how to paint and to sculpture those images, while we possess them only within our souls. They believe that anyone could have imagined a Madonna of Raphael; but that Raphael was Raphael owing to his technical ability in putting the Madonna upon the canvas. Nothing can be more false than this view. The world of which as a rule we have intuitions, is a small thing. It consists of little expressions which gradually become greater and more ample with the increasing spiritual concentration of certain moments. These are the sort of words which we speak

*Illusions as to their difference.*

within ourselves, the judgments that we tacitly express: "Here is a man, here is a horse, this is heavy, this is hard, this pleases me," etc. It is a medley of light and colour, which could not pictorially attain to any more sincere expression than a haphazard splash of colours, from among which would with difficulty stand out a few special, distinctive traits. This and nothing else is what we possess in our ordinary life; this is the basis of our ordinary action. It is the index of a book. The labels tied to things take the place of the things themselves. This index and labels (which are themselves expressions) suffice for our small needs and small actions. From time to time we pass from the index to the book, from the label to the thing, or from the slight to the greater intuitions, and from these to the greatest and most lofty. This passage is sometimes far from being easy. It has been observed by those who have best studied the psychology of artists, that when, after having given a rapid glance at anyone, they attempt to obtain a true intuition of him, in order, for example, to paint his portrait, then this ordinary vision, that seemed so precise, so lively, reveals itself as little better than nothing. What remains is found to be at the most some superficial trait, which would not even suffice for a caricature. The person to be painted stands before the artist like a world to discover. Michael Angelo said, "one paints, not with one's hands, but with one's brain." Leonardo shocked the prior of the convent delle Grazie by standing for days together opposite the "Last Supper" without touching it with the brush. He remarked of this attitude "that men of the most lofty genius, when they are doing the least work, are then the most active, seeking invention with their minds." The painter is a painter, because he sees what others only feel or catch a glimpse of, but do not see. We think we see a smile, but in reality we have only a vague impression of it, we do not perceive all the characteristic traits from which it results, as the painter perceives them after his internal meditations, which thus enable him to fix them on the canvas. Even in the case of our intimate friend, who is with us every day and at all hours, we do not possess intuitively more than, at the most, certain traits of his physiognomy, which enable us to distinguish him from others. The illusion is less easy as regards musical expression; because it would seem strange to everyone to say that the composer had added or attached notes to the motive, which is already in the mind of him who is not the composer. As if Beethoven's Ninth Symphony were not his own intuition and his own intuition the Ninth Symphony. Thus, just as he who is deceived as to his material wealth is confuted by arithmetic, which states its exact amount, so is he confuted who nourishes delusions as to the wealth of his own thoughts and images. He is brought back to reality, when he is obliged to cross the Bridge of Asses of expression. We say to the former, count; to the latter, speak, here is a pencil, draw, express yourself.

We have each of us, as a matter of fact, a little of the poet, of the sculptor, of the musician, of the painter, of the prose writer: but how

little, as compared with those who are so called, precisely because of the lofty degree in which they possess the most universal dispositions and energies of human nature! How little does a painter possess of the intuitions of a poet! How little does one painter possess those of another painter! Nevertheless, that little is all our actual patrimony of intuitions or representations. Beyond these are only impressions, sensations, feelings, impulses, emotions, or whatever else one may term what is outside the spirit, not assimilated by man, postulated for the convenience of exposition, but effectively inexistent, if existence be also a spiritual fact.

We may then add this to the verbal variants descriptive of intuition, noted at the beginning: intuitive knowledge is expressive knowledge, independent and autonomous in respect to intellectual function; indifferent to discriminations, posterior and empirical, to reality and to unreality, to formations and perceptions of space and time, even when posterior: intuition or representation is distinguished as form from what is felt and suffered, from the flux or wave of sensation, or from psychic material; and this form this taking possession of, is expression. To have an intuition is to express. It is nothing else! (nothing more, but nothing less) than *to express*.

## II. Intuition and Art

Before proceeding further, it seems opportune to draw certain consequences from what has been established and to add some explanation.

We have frankly identified intuitive or expressive knowledge with the aesthetic or artistic fact, taking works of art as examples of intuitive knowledge and attributing to them the characteristics of intuition, and *vice versa*. But our identification is combated by the view, held even by many philosophers, who consider art to be an intuition of an altogether special sort. "Let us admit" (they say) "that art is intuition; but intuition is not always art: artistic intuition is of a distinct species differing from intuition in general by something *more*."

But no one has ever been able to indicate of what this something more consists. It has sometimes been thought that art is not a simple intuition, but an intuition of an intuition, in the same way as the concept of science has been defined, not as the ordinary concept, but as the concept of a concept. Thus man should attain to art, by objectifying, not his sensations, as happens with ordinary intuition, but intuition itself. But this process of raising to a second power does not exist; and the comparison of it with the ordinary and scientific concept does not imply what is wished, for the good reason that it is not true that the scientific concept is the concept of

*Identity of intuition and expression.*

*Corollaries and explanations.*

*Identity of art and intuitive knowledge.*

*No specific difference.*

a concept. If this comparison imply anything, it implies just the opposite. The ordinary concept, if it be really a concept and not a simple representation, is a perfect concept, however poor and limited. Science substitutes concepts for representations; it adds and substitutes other concepts larger and more comprehensive for those that are poor and limited. It is ever discovering new relations. But its method does not differ from that by which is formed the smallest universal in the brain of the humblest of men. What is generally called art, by antonomasia, collects intuitions that are wider and more complex than those which we generally experience, but these intuitions are always of sensations and impressions.

Art is the expression of impressions, not the expression of expressions.

For the same reason, it cannot be admitted that intuition, which is generally called artistic, differs from ordinary intuition as to intensity. This would be the case if it were to operate differently on the same matter. But since artistic function is more widely distributed in different fields, but yet does not differ in method from ordinary intuition, the difference between the one and the other is not intensive but extensive. The intuition of the simplest popular love-song, which says the same thing, or very nearly, as a declaration of love such as issues at every moment from the lips of thousands of ordinary men, may be intensively perfect in its poor simplicity, although it be extensively so much more limited than the complex intuition of a love-song by Leopardi.

The whole difference, then, is quantitative, and as such, indifferent to philosophy, *scientia qualitatum*. Certain men have a greater aptitude, a more frequent inclination fully to express certain complex states of the soul. These men are known in ordinary language as artists. Some very complicated and difficult expressions are more rarely achieved and these are called works of art. The limits of the expressions and intuitions that are called art, as opposed to those that are vulgarly called not-art, are empirical and impossible to define. If an epigram be art, why not a single word? If a story; why not the occasional note of the journalist? If a landscape, why not a topographical sketch? The teacher of philosophy in Molière's comedy was right: "whenever we speak we create prose." But there will always be scholars like Monsieur Jourdain, astonished at having created prose for forty years without knowing it, and who will have difficulty in persuading themselves that when they call their servant John to bring their slippers, they have spoken nothing less than — prose.

We must hold firmly to our identification, because among the principal reasons which have prevented Aesthetic, the science of art, from revealing the true nature of art, its real roots in human nature, has been its separation from the general spiritual life, the having made of it a sort of special function or aristocratic circle. No one is astonished when he learns from physiology that every cellule is an organism and every organism a

cellule or synthesis of cellules. No one is astonished at finding in a lofty mountain the same chemical elements that compose a small stone or fragment. There is not one physiology of small animals and one of large animals; nor is there a special chemical theory of stones as distinct from mountains. In the same way, there is not a science of lesser intuition distinct from a science of greater intuition, nor one of ordinary intuition distinct from artistic intuition. There is but one Aesthetic, the science of intuitive or expressive knowledge, which is the aesthetic or artistic fact. And this Aesthetic is the true analogy of Logic. Logic includes, as facts of the same nature, the formation of the smallest and most ordinary concept and the most complicated scientific and philosophical system.

Nor can we admit that the word *genius* or artistic genius, as distinct from the non-genius of the ordinary man, possesses more than a quantitative signification. Great artists are said to reveal us to ourselves. But how could this be possible, unless there be identity of nature between their imagination and ours, and unless the difference be only one of quantity? It were well to change *poeta nascitur* into *homo nascitur poeta*: some men are born great poets, some small. The cult and superstition of the genius has arisen from this quantitative difference having been taken as a difference of quality. It has been forgotten that genius is not something that has fallen from heaven, but humanity itself. The man of genius, who poses or is represented as distant from humanity, finds his punishment in becoming or appearing somewhat ridiculous. Examples of this are the *genius* of the romantic period and the *superman* of our time.

But it is well to note here, that those who claim unconsciousness as the chief quality of an artistic genius, hurl him from an eminence far above humanity to a position far below it. Intuitive or artistic genius, like every form of human activity, is always conscious; otherwise it would be blind mechanism. The only thing that may be wanting to the artistic genius is the *reflective* consciousness, the superadded consciousness of the historian or critic, which is not essential to artistic genius.

The relation between matter and form, or between *content and form*, as it is generally called, is one of the most disputed questions in Aesthetic. Does the aesthetic fact consist of content alone, or of form alone, or of both together? This question has taken on various meanings, which we shall mention, each in its place. But when these words are taken as signifying what we have above defined, and matter is understood as emotivity not aesthetically elaborated, that is to say, impressions, and form elaboration, intellectual activity and expression, then our meaning cannot be doubtful. We must, therefore, reject the thesis that makes the aesthetic fact to consist of the content alone (that is, of the simple impressions), in like manner with that other thesis, which makes it to consist of a junction between form and content, that is, of impressions plus expressions. In the

aesthetic fact, the aesthetic activity is not added to the fact of the impressions, but these latter are formed and elaborated by it. The impressions reappear as it were in expression, like water put into a filter, which reappears the same and yet different on the other side. The aesthetic fact, therefore, is form, and nothing but form.

From this it results, not that the content is something superfluous (it is, on the contrary, the necessary point of departure for the expressive fact); but that *there is no passage* between the quality of the content and that of the form. It has sometimes been thought that the content, in order to be aesthetic, that is to say, transformable into form, should possess some determinate or determinable quality. But were that so, then form and content, expression and impression, would be the same thing. It is true that the content is that which is convertible into form, but it has no determinable qualities until this transformation takes place. We know nothing of its nature. It does not become aesthetic content at once, but only when it has been effectively transformed. Aesthetic content has also been defined as what is *interesting*. That is not an untrue statement; it is merely void of meaning. What, then, is interesting? Expressive activity? Certainly the expressive activity would not have raised the content to the dignity of form, had it not been interested. The fact of its having been interested is precisely the fact of its raising the content to the dignity of form. But the word “interesting” has also been employed in another not illegitimate sense, which we shall explain further on.

The proposition that art is *imitation of nature* has also several meanings. Now truth has been maintained or at least shadowed with these words, now error. More frequently, nothing definite has been thought. One of the legitimate scientific meanings occurs when imitation is understood as representation or intuition of nature, a form of knowledge. And when this meaning has been understood, by placing in greater relief the spiritual character of the process, the other proposition becomes also legitimate: namely, that art is the *idealization* or *idealizing* imitation of nature. But if by imitation of nature be understood that art gives mechanical reproductions, more or less perfect duplicates of natural objects, before which the same tumult of impressions caused by natural objects begins over again, then the proposition is evidently false. The painted wax figures that seem to be alive, and before which we stand astonished in the museums where such things are shown, do not give aesthetic intuitions. Illusion and hallucination have nothing to do with the calm domain of artistic intuition. If an artist paint the interior of a wax-work museum, or if an actor give a burlesque portrait of a man-statue on the stage, we again have spiritual labour and artistic intuition. Finally, if photography have anything in it of artistic, it will be to the extent that it transmits the intuition of the photographer, his point of view, the pose and the grouping which he has striven to attain. And if it be not alto-

*Critique of the imitation of nature and of the artistic illusion.*

gether art, that is precisely because the element of nature in it remains more or less insubordinate and ineradicable. Do we ever, indeed, feel complete satisfaction before even the best of photographs? Would not an artist vary and touch up much or little, remove or add something to any of them?

The statements repeated so often, with others similar, that art is not knowledge, that it does not tell the truth, that it does not belong to the world of theory, but to the world of feeling, arise from the failure to realize exactly the theoretic character of the simple intuition. This simple intuition is quite distinct from intellectual knowledge, as it is distinct from the perception of the real. The belief that only the intellective is knowledge, or at the most also the perception of the real, also arises from the failure to grasp the theoretic character of the simple intuition. We have seen that intuition is knowledge, free of concepts and more simple than the so-called perception of the real. Since art is knowledge and form, it does not belong to the world of feeling and of psychic material. The reason why so many aestheticians have so often insisted that art is *appearance* (*Schein*), is precisely because they have felt the necessity of distinguishing it from the more complex fact of perception by maintaining its pure intuitivity. For the same reason it has been claimed that art is *sentiment*. In fact, if the concept as content of art, and historical reality as such, be excluded, there remains no other content than reality apprehended in all its ingenuousness and immediateness in the vital effort, in *sentiment*, that is to say, pure intuition.

The theory of the *aesthetic senses* has also arisen from the failure to establish, or from having lost to view the character of the expression as distinct from the impression, of the form as distinct from the matter.

As has just been pointed out, this reduces itself to the error of wishing to seek a passage from the quality of the content to that of the form. To ask, in fact, what the aesthetic senses may be, implies asking what sensible impressions may be able to enter into aesthetic expressions, and what must of necessity do so. To this we must at once reply, that all impressions can enter into aesthetic expressions or formations, but that none are bound to do so. Dante raised to the dignity of form not only the “sweet colour of the oriental sapphire” (visual impression), but also tactile or thermic impressions, such as the “thick air” and the “fresh rivulets” which “parch all the more” the throat of the thirsty. The belief that a picture yields only visual impressions is a curious illusion. The bloom of a cheek, the warmth of a youthful body, the sweetness and freshness of a fruit, the cutting of a sharpened blade, are not these, also, impressions that we have from a picture? Maybe they are visual? What would a picture be for a hypothetical man, deprived of all or many of his senses, who

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*Critique of theory of aesthetic senses.*

should in an instant acquire the sole organ of sight? The picture we are standing opposite and believe we see only with our eyes, would appear to his eyes as little more than the paint-smear palette of a painter.

Some who hold firmly to the aesthetic character of given groups of impressions (for example, the visual, the auditive), and exclude others, admit, however, that if visual and auditive impressions enter *directly* into the aesthetic fact, those of the other senses also enter into it, but only as *associated*. But this distinction is altogether arbitrary. Aesthetic expression is a synthesis, in which it is impossible to distinguish direct and indirect. All impressions are by it placed on a level, in so far as they are aestheticised. He who takes into himself the image of a picture or of a poem does not experience, as it were, a series of impressions as to this image, some of which have a prerogative or precedence over others. And nothing is known of what happens prior to having received it, for the distinctions made after reflexion have nothing to do with art.

The theory of the aesthetic senses has also been presented in another way; that is to say, as the attempt to establish what physiological organs are necessary for the aesthetic fact. The physiological organ or apparatus is nothing but a complex of cellules, thus and thus constituted, thus and thus disposed; that is to say, it is merely physical and natural fact or concept. But expression does not recognize physiological facts. Expression has its point of departure in the impressions, and the physiological path by which these have found their way to the mind is to it altogether indifferent. One way or another amounts to the same thing: it suffices that they are impressions.

It is true that the want of given organs, that is, of given complexes of cells, produces an absence of given impressions (when these are not obtained by another path by a kind of organic compensation). The man born blind cannot express or have the intuition of light. But the impressions are not conditioned solely by the organ, but also by the stimuli which operate upon the organ. Thus, he who has never had the impression of the sea will never be able to express it, in the same way as he who has never had the impression of the great world or of the political conflict will never express the one or the other. This, however, does not establish a dependence of the expressive function on the stimulus or on the organ. It is the repetition of what we know already: expression presupposes impression. Therefore, given expressions imply given impressions. Besides, every impression excludes other impressions during the moment in which it dominates; and so does every expression.

Another corollary of the conception of expression as activity is the *indivisibility* of the work of art. Every expression is a unique expression. Activity is a fusion of the impressions in an organic whole. A desire to

*Unity and indivisibility of the work of art.*

express this has always prompted the affirmation that the world of art should have *unity*, or, what amounts to the same thing, *unity in variety*. Expression is a synthesis of the various, the multiple, in the one.

The fact that we divide a work of art into parts, as a poem into scenes, episodes, similes, sentences, or a picture into single figures and objects, background, foreground, etc., may seem to be an objection to this affirmation. But such division annihilates the work, as dividing the organism into heart, brain, nerves, muscles and so on, turns the living being into a corpse. It is true that there exist organisms in which the division gives place to more living things, but in such a case, and if we transfer the analogy to the aesthetic fact, we must conclude for a multiplicity of germs of life, that is to say, for a speedy re-elaboration of the single parts into new single expressions.

It will be observed that expression is sometimes based on other expressions. There are simple and there are *compound* expressions. One must admit some difference between the *eureka*, with which Archimedes expressed all his joy after his discovery, and the expressive act (indeed all the five acts) of a regular tragedy. Not in the least: expression is always directly based on impressions. He who conceives a tragedy puts into a crucible a great quantity, so to say, of impressions: the expressions themselves, conceived on other occasions, are fused together with the new in a single mass, in the same way as we can cast into a smelting furnace formless pieces of bronze and most precious statuettes. Those most precious statuettes must be melted in the same way as the formless bits of bronze, before there can be a new statue. The old expressions must descend again to the level of impressions, in order to be synthetized in a new single expression.

By elaborating his impressions, man *frees* himself from them. By objectifying them, he removes them from him and makes himself their superior. The liberating and purifying function of art is another aspect and another formula of its character of activity. Activity is the deliverer, just because it drives away passivity.

This also explains why it is customary to attribute to artists alike the maximum of sensibility or *passion*, and the maximum insensibility or Olympic *serenity*. Both qualifications agree, for they do not refer to the same object. The sensibility or passion relates to the rich material which the artist absorbs into his psychic organism; the insensibility or serenity to the form with which he subjugates and dominates the tumult of the feelings and of the passions.

## XV. The Activity of Externalization, Technique and the Theory of the Arts

The fact of the production of the physically beautiful implies, as has already been remarked, a vigilant will, which persists in not allowing certain visions, intuitions, or representations, to be lost. Such a will must be able to act with the utmost rapidity, and as it were instinctively, and also be capable of long and laborious deliberations. Thus and only thus does the practical activity enter into relations with the aesthetic, that is to say, in effecting the production of physical objects, which are aids to memory. Here it is not merely a concomitant, but really a distinct moment of the aesthetic activity. We cannot will or not will our aesthetic vision: we can, however, will or not will to externalize it, or better, to preserve and communicate, or not, to others, the externalization produced.

*The practical activity of externalization.*

This volitional fact of externalization is preceded by a complex of various kinds of knowledge. These are known as *techniques*, like all knowledge which precedes the practical activity. Thus we talk of an artistic technique in the same metaphorical and elliptic manner that we talk of the physically beautiful, that is to say (in more precise language), *knowledge employed by the practical activity engaged in producing stimuli to aesthetic reproduction*. In place of employing so lengthy a phrase, we shall here avail ourselves of the vulgar terminology, since we are henceforward aware of its true meaning.

*The technique of externalization.*

The possibility of this technical knowledge, at the service of artistic reproduction, has caused people to imagine the existence of an aesthetic technique of internal expression, which is tantamount to saying, *a doctrine of the means of internal expression*, which is altogether inconceivable. And we know well the reason why it is inconceivable; expression, considered in itself, is primary theoretic activity, and, in so far as it is this, it precedes the practical activity and the intellectual knowledge which illumines the practical activity, and is thus independent alike of the one and of the other. It also helps to illumine the practical activity, but is not illuminated by it. Expression does not employ *means*, because it has not an *end*; it has intuitions of things, but does not will them, and is thus indivisible into means and end. Thus if it be said, as sometimes is the case, that a certain writer has invented a new technique of fiction or of drama, or that a painter has discovered a new mode of distribution of light, the word is used in a false sense; because the so-called *new technique is really that romance itself, or that new picture itself*. The distribution of light belongs to the vision itself of the picture; as the technique

of a dramatist is his dramatic conception itself. On other occasions, the word “technique” is used to designate certain merits or defects in a work which is a failure; and it is said, euphemistically, that the conception is bad, but the technique good, or that the conception is good, and the technique bad.

On the other hand, when the different ways of painting in oils, or of etching, or of sculpturing in alabaster, are discussed, then the word “technique” is in its place; but in such a case the adjective “artistic” is used metaphorically. And if a dramatic technique in the artistic sense be impossible, a theatrical technique is not impossible, that is to say, processes of externalization of certain given aesthetic works. When, for instance, women were introduced on the stage in Italy in the second half of the sixteenth century, in place of men dressed as women, this was a true and real discovery in theatrical technique; such too was the perfecting in the following century by the impresarios of Venice, of machines for the rapid changing of the scenes.

The collection of technical knowledge at the service of artists desirous of externalizing their expressions, can be divided into groups, which may be entitled *The theoretic techniques of the individual arts*. Thus is born a theory of Architecture, comprising mechanical laws, information relating to the weight or to the resistance of the materials of construction or of fortification, manuals relating to the method of mixing chalk or stucco; a theory of Sculpture, containing advice as to the instruments to be used for sculpturing the various sorts of stone, for obtaining a successful fusion of bronze, for working with the chisel, for the exact copying of the model in chalk or plaster, for keeping chalk damp; a theory of Painting, on the various techniques of tempera, of oil-painting, of water-colour, of pastel, on the proportions of the human body, on the laws of perspective; a theory of Oratory, with precepts as to the method of producing, of exercising and of strengthening the voice, of mimic and gesture; a theory of Music, on the combinations and fusions of tones and sounds; and so on. Such collections of precepts abound in all literatures. And since it soon becomes impossible to say what is useful and what useless to know, books of this sort become very often a sort of encyclopaedias or catalogues of desiderata. Vitruvius, in his treatise on Architecture, claims for the architect a knowledge of letters, of drawing, of geometry, of arithmetic, of optic, of history, of natural and moral philosophy, of jurisprudence, of medicine, of astrology, of music, and so on. Everything is worth knowing: learn the art and lay it aside.

It should be evident that such empirical collections are not reducible to a science. They are composed of notions, taken from various sciences and teachings, and their philosophical and scientific principles are to be found in them. To undertake the construction of a scientific theory of the different arts, would be to wish to reduce to the single and homogeneous



what is by nature multiple and heterogeneous; to wish to destroy the existence as a collection of what was put together precisely to form a collection. Were we to give a scientific form to the manuals of the architect, the painter, or the musician, it is clear that nothing would remain in our hands but the general principles of Mechanic, Optic, or Acoustic. Or if the especially artistic observations disseminated through it be extracted and isolated, and a science be made of them, then the sphere of the individual art is deserted and that of Aesthetic entered upon, for Aesthetic is always general Aesthetic, or better, it cannot be divided into general and special. This last case (that is, the attempt to furnish a technique of Aesthetic) is found, when men possessing strong scientific instincts and a natural tendency to philosophy, set themselves to work to produce such theories and technical manuals.

But the confusion between Physic and Aesthetic has attained to its highest degree, when aesthetic theories of the different arts are imagined, to answer such questions as: What are the *limits* of each art? What can be represented with colours, and what with sounds? What with simple monochromatic lines, and what with touches of various colours? What with notes, and what with metres and rhymes? What are the limits between the figurative and the auditional arts, between painting and sculpture, poetry and music?

This, translated into scientific language, is tantamount to asking: What is the connexion between Acoustic and aesthetic expression? What between the latter and Optic? — and the like. Now, if *there is no passage* from the physical fact to the aesthetic, how could there be from the aesthetic to particular groups of aesthetic facts, such as the phenomena of Optic or of Acoustic?

The things called *Arts* have no aesthetic limits, because, in order to have them, they would need to have also aesthetic existence; and we have demonstrated the altogether empirical genesis of those divisions. Consequently, any attempt at an aesthetic classification of the arts is absurd. If they be without limits, they are not exactly determinable, and consequently cannot be philosophically classified. All the books dealing with classifications and systems of the arts could be burned without any loss whatever. (We say this with the utmost respect to the writers who have expended their labours upon them.)

The impossibility of such classifications finds, as it were, its proof in the strange methods to which recourse has been had to carry them out. The first and most common classification is that into arts of *hearing*, *sight*, and *imagination*; as if eyes, ears, and imagination were on the same level, and could be deduced from the same logical variable, as foundation of the division. Others have proposed the division into arts of *space and time*, and arts of *rest and motion*; as if the concepts of space,

*Critique of the aesthetic theories of the individual arts.*

*Critique of the classifications of the arts.*

time, rest, and motion could determine special aesthetic forms, or have anything in common with art as such. Finally, others have amused themselves by dividing them into *classic and romantic*, or into *oriental, classic, and romantic*, thereby conferring the value of scientific concepts on simple historical denominations, or adopting those pretended partitions of expressive forms, already criticized above; or by talking of arts *that can only be seen from one side*, like painting, and of arts *that can be seen from all sides*, like sculpture — and similar extravagances, which exist neither in heaven nor on the earth.

The theory of the limits of the arts was, perhaps, at the time when it was put forward, a beneficial critical reaction against those who believed in the possibility of the flowing of one expression into another, as of the *Iliad* or of *Paradise Lost* into a series of paintings, and thus held a poem to be of greater or lesser value, according as it could or could not be translated into pictures by a painter. But if the rebellion were reasonable and victorious, this does not mean that the arguments adopted and the theories made as required were sound.

Another theory which is a corollary to that of the limits of the arts, falls with them; that of the *union of the arts*. Granted different arts, distinct and limited, the questions were asked: Which is the most powerful? Do we not obtain more powerful effects by uniting several? We know nothing of this: we know only, in each individual case, that certain given artistic intuitions have need of definite physical means for their reproduction, and that other artistic intuitions have need of other physical means. We can obtain the effect of certain dramas by simply reading them; others need declamation and scenic display: some artistic intuitions, for their full extrinsication, need words, song, musical instruments, colours, statuary, architecture, actors; while others are beautiful and complete in a single delicate sweep of the pen, or with a few strokes of the pencil. But it is false to suppose that declamation and scenic effects, and all the other things we have mentioned together, are *more powerful* than simply reading, or than the simple stroke with the pen and with the pencil; because each of these facts or groups of facts has, so to say, a different object, and the power of the different means employed cannot be compared when the objects are different.

Finally, it is only from the point of view of a clear and rigorous distinction between the true and proper aesthetic activity, and the practical activity of externalization, that we can solve the involved and confused questions as to the relations between *art and utility*, and *art and morality*.

That art as art is independent alike of utility and of morality, as also of every volitional form, we have above demonstrated. Without this independence, it would not be possible to speak of an intrinsic value of art,

*Critique of the theory of the union of the arts.*

*Connexion of the activity of externalization with utility and morality.*

nor indeed to conceive an aesthetic science, which demands the autonomy of the aesthetic fact as a necessity of its existence.

But it would be erroneous to maintain that this independence of the vision or intuition or internal expression of the artist should be at once extended to the practical activity of externalization and of communication, which may or may not follow the aesthetic fact. If art be understood as the externalization of art, then utility and morality have a perfect right to deal with it; that is to say, the right one possesses to deal with one's own household.

We do not, as a matter of fact, externalize and fix all of the many expressions and intuitions which we form in our mind; we do not declare our every thought in a loud voice, or write down, or print, or draw, or colour, or expose it to the public gaze. *We select* from the crowd of intuitions which are formed or at least sketched within us; and the selection is governed by selection of the economic conditions of life and of its moral direction. Therefore, when we have formed an intuition, it remains to decide whether or no we should communicate it to others, and to whom, and when, and how; all of which considerations fall equally under the utilitarian and ethical criterion.

Thus we find the concepts of *selection*, of the *interesting*, of *morality*, of an *educational end*, of *popularity*, etc., to some extent justified, although these can in no wise be justified as imposed upon art as art, and we have ourselves denounced them in pure Aesthetic. Error always contains an element of truth. He who formulated those erroneous aesthetic propositions had his eye on practical facts, which attach themselves externally to the aesthetic fact in economic and moral life.

By all means, be partisans of a yet greater liberty in the vulgarization of the means of aesthetic reproduction; we are of the same opinion, and let us leave the proposals for legislative measures, and for actions to be instigated against immoral art, to hypocrites, to the ingenuous, and to idlers. But the proclamation of this liberty, and the fixation of its limits, how wide soever they be, is always the affair of morality. And it would in any case be out of place to invoke that highest principle, that *fundamentum Aestheticum*, which is the independence of art, in order to deduce from it the guiltlessness of the artist, who, in the externalization of his imaginings, should calculate upon the unhealthy tastes of his readers; or that licenses should be granted to the hawkers who sell obscene statuettes in the streets. This last case is the affair of the police; the first must be brought before the tribunal of the moral conscience. The aesthetic judgment on the work of art has nothing to do with the morality of the artist, in so far as he is a practical man, nor with the precautions to be taken that art may not be employed for evil purposes alien to its essence, which is pure theoretic contemplation.