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Vision and Emotion in Art

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First lecture

Honorable audience!

These won't be systematic lectures on aesthetics. For those, we would need more time. Even though we can't go on without some kind of a system, as we need to start it all somewhere, and according to our experience it's always best to start it in the beginning.

We will mention and discuss a few greater art-aesthetic topics, so we may learn from them a little. The title of this very first lecture could be something like - about arts in general, and about the goals of aesthetics. Let's put the second one forth – what would art-aesthetic want to achieve, and what does it consist of? We could settle it down easily right now, that aesthetics could be viewed as a part of philosophy, because when it is about the courses of arts, it investigates how, what for, and what does art does to us? Every kind of inquiries like these is philosophical.

Philosophy and naivety

It may be not worthless to mention it right here what I thought about the courses of philosophy in these last times: I had more and more strongly the impression that in fact, the childish attitude of mankind, the naivety of us is what produces philosophy – in other words the philosophical inclination of humans is most probably rooted in the inherent and naive, but fundamental curiosity what describes our childhood so well. I don't want to call philosophy such as childish science, on the contrary: none other science demands from us such matured rationality, justification and judgment like philosophy and when I talk about our inherent naivety in connection to it, I would just like to show the origin of its spiritual grounds. Because, what is our experience with this? How is the curiosity of the adult in general, and how does it compare to the children? Don't the children open their toys, to see what's inside them? For their secrets? What are they made of? What moves the eyes of dolls in their heads? Don't they have questions such as why does this and that exist? What is its goal? Who made it, and why did they make it? Who made the world and why? What about the palace of the king? Why do they judge there? An endless stream of questions, naturally. Then after that? What about later?

Later on, these questions of the children fade away. At the age of an adult, they have already accepted to view this intrinsic intrigue barren, so it is avoided and questions such as the mentioned ones rarely if ever thought of again – for example, in fact, what is truth? Or justice? Or why do we need to suffer for being as we are, even though we weren't created by ourselves? Questions such as these only occur to them at funerals or weddings, in the critical or interesting moments of life. The so-called adult humans usually ask things like – what kind of relationship do we need to have with our superiors, (Something that Goethe, Knigge, and Gracian ask a lot as well) or when it is advised to stay silent, compared to fighting for something with saying our opinions out loud? Or with an even more trivial example, for building a house what kind and how many bricks would one need? It's just like this, isn't it? Most probably – all our experiences show this, at least. So the interest in the soul of adults is best described as an interest towards the concrete, towards the advantageous. Because we already used the word “concrete” the best would be to tell what do we mean with it. We need to lay down it as a foundation that we will call things concrete that are within the reach of our eyes, so the details of reality and not its horizon. The great questions are always inquiring about the horizon. This is exactly what is so rare from adult humans, they gave up their great questions long ago, because in their experience it's not possible to get useful and practical answers to them. In awe and wonder they listen to their children when they would ask such as – if God created the world, then why weren't the houses created along with it already as well? So the parents think in themselves with a smile, that these questions are truly childish.

The three main questions of philosophy

Even though a whole line of such or at least similar questions are inquired by theology. Let's mention the origin of these questions now. However endless our thoughts became lately and however self-serving the philosophy of humanity became in the end, it's roots and original motives seem practical and instrumental to me. Because in any way I may think about it, I can't have a different opinion about philosophy than originally and before anything else, it tries to find answers to questions such as: what is the cause of something, so what does it originate from? Secondly, what is the nature of it? And lastly, what is it's purpose, so what is the goal of it? Just as in the past, greek philosophy described the foundations for itself, that in the investigation of anything one needs to start with these questions. So once more: what this thing is like, how did it come to be and what is it for?

Don't children do exactly the same all the time? Basic and simple, because it's still grounded in their naivety, their mind and curiosity with so little experience so far will try to orientate based on these three principles. One can barely satisfy their questions.

It seems so then, that these two activities of humanity's spirit just as philosophy as arts bear witness of the ever-being presence of the most important and greatest virtue, the most beautiful aspect of its soul. We will of course talk in detail about the reasons why would its art rooted in naivety as well, at the right time and place.

But first, we shall talk about our general goals, that why and how would we want to talk about our subject? So we need to talk about the function of aesthetics first – so we shall start with the inquiry of beauty such as it is with courses like this.

Inquiry of beauty

For starters, we can surely agree in the following, that however different affections arts may have on us, the emotion of appreciation so the joy of beauty is surely aroused in us by them. If this is the case, then aesthetics is surely concerned with the study of attraction, and it's philosophy – even so, that attraction is an emotion, so whether we inquiry about the nature of this emotion, whether what arouses this emotion in us - can't do without certain psychological means. Basically, aesthetics seems to be in part philosophy and in another part psychology. Let it be noted as early as this moment, that it being much less the science of reason than the psychological science of emotions, one can successfully work within this framework if they like emotions, or else... It would be just as if a witless, dry people would try a cheerless study on the psychology of humor, such a soul who hasn't got the tiniest sense of humor. Let it be said again: we will have an opportunity to examine two kinds of things, firstly that what kinds of things are usually considered beautiful by us. This is what will we do for sure, in most of our lectures. Secondly, that what kind of feeling beauty is in us, and this is what we will not do, we will not examine it thoroughly mostly because we can't get to the bottom of the matter such as nobody else before we could have done so either. We have two well-known definitions of beauty, and both grasp both the feeling of beauty just as beautiful things themselves, even so they are defined by each other. The first is the famous definition by Kant, that beauty is what pleases without interest – and in this as we can see, we don't get a ready definition of what "pleasing" is, what kind of feeling it is, when is it produced and what kind of things arouse it in us. Just as confusing this quote can be just as well, because we know nothing sure about our interests. The concept of interest could be said to be the following: one's interest lies at the things their desires point to. One's desires very often lead us to harmful directions, though. I

would very like to gamble for example, and my mother says to me: it is not my interest. As she is not thinking about satisfying my momentary desires as my interest, but neither the church nor secular ethics besides hedonism. For example, my mother may tell me to don't drink water as I've been running and I'm sweating hot. We usually say that my body notifies me of it's interests. But this is not entirely true, nature is not that consistent in this principle as my body when being hot, with the stronger sweating certainly needs some water, just as cooling down so both of these are in it's interest – but to pursue both interests may be harmful, even though strangely my body doesn't notify me of that, only my mother does. So the laws of nature are not that consistent, not planned by great caution but more seem like exceptions of broad and general principles governing this world, just for example rain falls both to the oceans where there is already a lot of water and to the cities that may need much less of it than agricultural fields.

The disinterest of Kant

To return to our earlier thoughts, even in this aspect we would need to differentiate the permanent usefulness from the momentary, so from pleasure, even though because these two are in disagreement very often. On another note though, that we could view our pleasure as our interest, that seems uncontroversial. Let us be any more puzzled over this, we need to assume that Kant's definition wants to exclude permanent usefulness from our pleasure.

But let us not consider the thought of permanent usefulness and make our job easier by equaling the word "interest" with desire, assuming that Kant defined the main criteria of aesthetic beauty by desire-less pleasure. We stand before a beautiful apple or a beautiful woman, and we are enchanted without any desire – in a grandiose tone, without any earthly desires (when desire doesn't affect our pleasure). If we explain the word "interest" in this way, then we still need to beg to differ, because of psychological reasons. May be true, that looking at a beautiful, real apple doesn't necessarily make us want to bite into it and eat it as soon as possible, even if at times our behavior with a beautiful child may raise such a suspicion.

To love: it also means a desire of consumption

Because we pinch it until the child may cry out, in our hot helplessness that we can't embrace it fully, and in these cases our interests full of desire ends in seemingly different expressions, that we like both lamb and the little Charles, in it's tendency becomes clear that in fact I would very like to gulp down both of them – just as it is most probably, that both come from the same ancient roots. As we know, what do even mothers do? "I'll eat you up! I'll break your bones!" They exclaim to us, almost doing it, becoming torturers in their insatiability. This is nothing but a side track. We were discussing whether a beautiful apple may absolutely arouse hunger in us? Not absolutely, we concluded. What about a painted apple? In that we are not attracted by it's expected taste at all, but the forms painted stimulate us. Neither the beauty of a peacock, a dome or a rug could arouse love or hunger in us, nor the warted nose of the grandfather of Ghirlandajo could arouse such desires or hopes, even though this is what we admire the most in him. This is true even for the monstrous figures of Brueghel, the dwarves of Velazquez, and so on. So if we examine the word let's say practically, in an easy and superficial sense, comparing the word by Kant to

satisfaction, then we need to conclude him being right. What is it good for, though? That what is in this state of the soul, when we are pleased by something, we can hardly tell for sure, but only dance around this complexity. Isn't it better this way, so we know more about it from different perspectives? We could also ask for example, if there is surely no satisfaction in beauty, as we can examine even this question if we are about to get to the bottom of this disinterest of Kant. Because: if something that is beautiful pleases me, then this pleasure is already the joy of selfishness, so both our interest and benefit already. We could also say, that it may not be possible to differentiate it from our bodies' self-interest, as the joys of selfishness always include the hiding satisfaction of some of our desires. Let's see an example: if someone would be convicted to watch nothing but the most beautiful mountains and flowery-green fields for forty years, it's difficult to imagine them still seeing these as beautiful. But if someone comes from a dirty city filled with smoke, where they had to stay for way too much time...

Satisfaction in beauty

Did they desire the green mountains? We can't be even sure, that they had such a desire formed within themselves. We can assure though, that his whole body wanted the stimuli of change: after the smoky city they needed different stimuli, and here it comes, the green mountains or fields brought their eyes and other senses this change. If there was nothing like this in pleasing, if the necessary wishes of changing stimuli wouldn't act in ourselves even in this, then we could see the masterpiece of any artist for any length and any times – for example, ten times a day for ten years -, and it should be able to always make the same impression on us. We know though that this is not the case. If I like a landscape more so because I needed change, and if I don't, because I needed change as well, as I'm bored seeing it and it tires me (because even the most beautiful image couldn't please me if I need to see it all the time) – if all these are true, then desire indeed have something to do with this, because there are desires fulfilled involved, so there is nothing selfless about it. So what is the worth of such an abstract that almost mathematical statement? Beauty is a concrete thing, and feeling beauty is a concrete feeling, so with a statement that defines these both so abstractly, we can barely do anything. We could even call it fruitless from the viewpoint of our investigation. What is it good for, then? To bring attention to an absolute moment of aesthetic pleasing, a moment that we so rarely get to live in reality.

What is pleasing?

Because what does it mean, that something "pleases" me? What does it consist of? A barrel organ could move me to tears, so is this moving a feel of pleasing? Or: do I have interest in such a moving? I don't know. So then, what is pleasing - as this is our central question? We should already switch to the domain of psychology, to get closer to this phenomena of the soul. That is exactly what we will be not doing, even at this very question, because the current state of psychology declares the inquiry of such a question fruitless. Let's be honest and confess that we have no idea what kind of activity it is, when something pleases a soul. We only know from experience, to state from historical events, that what it is that usually pleases it. We may like psychology as much as we do, at this point we won't investigate the pleased and neither their soul, that why would they like a certain object, but the object itself - that which requirements make it possible, which elements

usually make us remember pleasing, and try to make some general statements about it based on our experiences.

Pleasing as a physiological phenomenon

Pleasing itself, like every activity or phenomena of the soul is a certainly complex thing. Because something like the following can be assured already, and shall we do so, that for example: the human organism likes varied stimulation, and even more so, according to physiology most likely only these kind are capable of keeping it alive – uniform stimulation first causes boredom, then disgust but in the end they can even kill (in the Far East, it is even a method of execution, let us imagine that the face of someone is caressed for two days straight). So we will need to conclude something along these lines about beauty as well, that the soul likes variety just as much as the body does. Or we can say, that where we got enormous speed, there is a need for a hindering, decelerating power too in our organisms – in this regard we will follow the guidelines of physiology, as our hearts and other organs workings need something both to accelerate and decelerate itself (vagus and accelerans), in beauty we get an impression from something that is hindered in speed as well, something that is not entirely smooth, something that has contradictions, for example quarrel in forms, rawness in the delicacy of fabrication, or in content: contrast in the detailed persons' traits, and likewise, the human organism doesn't seem to register easily that is too slow, and has no dynamism, as yet again based on physiology it is the home of dynamic motions, and so on. We will consider the pleased soul just this much, and let's repeat ourselves: we will investigate the object more thoroughly, based on our experience, that what does usually please human beings.

The definition of Stendhal

Let's not forget about the other world-known definition of beauty, that was made by Stendhal. Beauty is the promise of happiness – said Stendhal. Now, the Kantian definition is usually viewed as objective, maybe because in it we are not concerned with the feeling of beauty, so with it's subjectivity, we don't pay attention to it's effect on ourselves – he even assures us, that clear beauty has nothing to promise for our selfishness, only the clean and interest-less joy of beauty. Stendhal though – whose definition is usually said to be subjective not like the Kantian one – says the opposite, he promises the brightest fulfillment of our selfishness, happiness itself with it (just as our great thinker Ernő Osváth said so, the heart becomes thirsty from beautiful things). We may find this a little bit more of our help. Because if we don't know what happiness is, how could we even know what the promise of happiness could be? But let us stop now for a moment. Happiness – lot of us were daydreaming about this heavenly concept, if I remember well, Flaubert originated it from luck, making it dependent on external conditions: being french, young, rich, an artist, in love, that is happiness – he said it somewhere along these lines. I beg to differ, that I've seen people made happy by just a good meal or a cigar, and heard about someone who bearing all the conditions by Flaubert ended up committing suicide. What does follow from this? First and foremost: that to imagine happiness as a static state at the very least means shallow thinking, because imagining the eternal feeling of happiness is boring enough in itself, even so experiencing it, and if it's boring then it can't be happiness at all. (Anyhow we know, that because of the nature of this feeling, it can't last

too long.) Secondly, at the question of pleasing we didn't consider the souls involved, because with our tools provided so far we can't recognize nor describe the movements caused in a soul by beauty, so we won't inquire the pleased soul but the object, that how does it become pleasurable for humans – but now we will do the exact opposite, because of the following. Poverty can often cause unhappiness, that we know, but to consider richness to make anyone happy, now that sounds dubious, even if we add to it all the other great criteria by Flaubert. Nobody could be so bold if they may know life to say it as a law that all young french artists are happy, And why wouldn't they say such a thing? Because we may not be able to describe happiness even less than pleasure, but we know as little as to say that in practice some people are easier to make happy than others. Wouldn't it be better in this case to inquire the psychological conditions of humans? That which temper is available for happiness, that we know how good temper is the best gift, and to better know in which conditions may a human be more receptive to happiness, so when are they more worthy of the experience they desired before? Even more so: does lucky changes, sudden happiness and surprise have more part in it, than the fulfillment of enduring desire? Is poverty more capable of happiness or richness? From a psychological point of view we could even ask, if happiness is a state where the human being becomes so absorbed that they dive into the timeless, original state where they are finally got rid of their eternal anxieties as well? (Angst, als Hauptprinzip des menschlichen Lebens – were written about this anxiety by a German psychologist.) In this state they are freed from all the compulsive distractions as well. This amazing state of the soul describes all our joys, but the imagined happiness even more so. I said imagined happiness, and it will be understandable why, if we consider that happiness may be something that exists only in our imagination and dreams, that has some ancient imprint on our souls but none of us are capable of living and experiencing it, and so forth? We could consider all these questions, but we may not need all of these now, because even if we don't know what happiness is and how does it form in human hearts, we can still find a saying remarkable such that beauty is the promise of happiness. As it shows us interesting psychological facts, mostly because it's not after a definition about the ideal and clean pleasure, entirely free of earthly desires, but it touches the immediate connection of our emotions heavy with desires, not saying that beauty would make us happy, but only that it promises happiness for us... and with this promise, Stendhal stops himself proving a great amount of life experience. We are delighted to see this, as this way we see our unsatisfaction justified by it, a feeling we all experience throughout our lives, knowing that all the beauties of our imagination, so arts as well show us just the illusion of things and never the things themselves. In other words we can't have the apples on the painting, and even less the heroine of a novel we have fallen in love with. So Stendhal shows us the way with this word of promise, so we can try to grasp where could we find one of the melancholic element of the enjoyment of arts. That why is a life so melancholic that is spent among myriads of fantasies? That what kind of disgust that is the one summoned into the human heart by the endless play of imagination – that how different the imagined satisfaction is from real enjoyments? We have these kind of questions forming after reading the definition of Stendhal.

The melancholic elements of arts origins

Because the enormous and giant art-hoard of the world surely has melancholic elements too - that doesn't necessarily mean that arts in their subjects are tragic or melancholic as well, even though literary and musical arts can lean towards such, but even: this statement doesn't want to

mean that the artist itself is melancholic when creating, with some time we will prove the exact opposite, so this statement here firstly means, that the origin and source of arts in ourselves has melancholic motives as well. For example this motive is just like that: I'm writing down something that won't ever return, so I paint you or write about you my sweetheart, because I want to treasure how beautiful you were today. Don't you feel what kind of a need there is deep within this intention, and even so in the amazing process that expresses the intention, that it was, it was, it was... In the spectacular, almost hypnotizing smoothness the storytellers make us sense transience, that something gone is something nowhere to be found. Anyhow, the melancholic elements of arts' origin without doubt contribute to the enjoyment of the artwork, including the melancholic fact that we can never meet the so liked actors in a novel, nowhere in life. But maybe I won't even continue along these lines, as we will have enough occasion to do so later on.

Let us summarize maybe what did we talk about so far? We said, that philosophical courses are just as much the process of soul's naivety as every kind of arts by humans, then we fleetingly judged two important definitions of beauty. We were discussing Stendhal's definition and at the part that art seems to be a joy of humanity, heavy with melancholy, and Stendhal's definition made me aware of such an element of arts: that arts only promise fulfillment through the world of illusions, only alluring us. So whoever lives in arts only, they live in imagination - living half of their lives and not the whole of it.

Beauty as ethical history

This definition makes us consider different, even more important things. Based on these we could even say that we have nothing more on our interest than beauty itself. Because let's not forget what does beauty lead us to, what does it attract us to? You are beautiful, I love you. Doesn't it happen just like this in our souls? Then even from this aspect, Stendhal is right when he promises happiness with it, because to love: it is clearly some of the basics of happiness in us. Then just because of this, there are ethical consequences of this temptation as well. In my opinion, love and goodness could be very much different – first is one of our emotion, second is an intention or will: so goodness is the final intention of feeling ethical – as love is capable of hatred and killing, but goodness never, and yet I say, however much they are differentiated, nobody could disagree that love has ethical consequences in the soul. If we are pleased by something, we are open to love it, I could even say that love usually originates this way in us, through beauty, so just as I mentioned just like this: you are beautiful, I love you. And what I love, I'm more open to being good to that. Doesn't it happen this way in human hearts?

Intensity of beauty

So beauty takes us to ethical areas as well, and we can see from this what a great power it is! With a slight silliness we could even say, that it's the great power of this whole wide world. Clearly this was the intention of nature as well, as it mostly placed beauty on surfaces, efficiently, accessible by our sense – but it works and with what an intensity! Or isn't it true, that every other value of things and human beings are deeply under their surface, with such difficulty to explore – let's just mention how difficult is it to tell if someone is good-willed or not. We see it immediately if a pocket watch is beautiful or not, but if it works well or not, now that takes time to tell. Just like this, it's

much more difficult and takes indirect ways to make sure of persons morality and other attributes, not like their beauty. There's no need to even mention, how fast we are ready to love a beautiful child, granting our good intentions just because of their beauty.