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ART AS REGARDS SCIENCE AND RELIGION

It is commonly thought that art is an individual creativity producing aesthetic values. But, without knowing what art is, we cannot define aesthetic value either. John Berger suggests in his Picasso book that art is a way of seeing. Social scientists suggest that it is a form of learning. However, they do not have any definition of art. Here I am concerned with the differentiating, distinctive characteristic of art itself rather than the conceptions of art products. Given that human beings have many different modes of seeing, understanding, expression and communication, exact definition of art can be provided only with direct references to science and religion which are other two dominant forms of human intellectuality. Art, science and religion are the only systematic learning and seeing systems humans have hitherto produced.

As commonly conceived, the distinctive aspects of art are based on individuality, creativity and aesthetics. If those concepts sufficient identify art, we have to ask whether science or religion, as two other different forms of learning and seeing, can not have these characteristics as well. It can be said that science distinguishes itself with proof principle from art or religion. Scientific inquiry starts with theses, initial ideas, doubts and even prejudices. It tries to reveal initial and essential dynamics of the subject-matter and express them in the form of scientific laws. At the end it has to justify and prove its initial arguments. At least it has to be directed to this purpose.

The principle of proof also shows another aspect of scientific inquiry, which is most controversial for scientific communities. It is the tension between absolute and relative truth. However, if one accepts that science put forwards some laws, these laws necessarily imply absolute truths of the science under consideration. It is sure that absolute truths are reinterpreted, tested, improved or left aside, partially or completely when they are seen inadequate or wrong in the face of new social relations, new social needs and new social problems. Here, it is seen that the meaning of truth, of absolute and of laws are confined to the history and geography of human beings. A good example is the labour theory of value, which is only absolute in the context of capitalist mode of production, which is confined to a historical and geographical framework. Thus, absolute does not refer to any eternal and fixed truth.

As for relativity, I observe that it is an unfortunate concept as long as it is understood as the opposite of absolute. However, relative refers to a context and a relation of different forces originating from and belonging to the same totality. For example, time cannot be identified or measured without having and referring to space. Time and space are absolutely essential parts of change and movement and they are defined in relation to each other. Absolute is limited with time and space, has a relation to time and space and accordingly it is relative. As regards science, it can be said that it seeks to find absolute and relative at the same time as the truths of certain time and certain space (read time as history and space as geography).

Art does not attempt to prove anything, as correct or wrong, valid or invalid. But, it seeks to reveal a sort of truth which can be considered aesthetic truths in the form of basic rules, standards, and levels. It defines the framework of beauty or ugliness as two opposing aesthetic values. These values may be composed according to the branch of art; of sounds, figures, gestures, behaviors, lines, words, shapes, tastes, textures and all kind of materials, social, natural or imagined. However, do we have an objective criterion for the determination of beauty or ugly? Are beauty and ugliness completely under the domain of subjectivity or to say social and cultural relativism?

I think the reverse is true, on the contrary of popular belief.

Tastes and preferences develop and change with material and mental development, intellectuality, education and class mobility. If we interpret Aristotle, a development from basic to complex existence implies a development from basic to complex tastes and preferences. It is a widely observed phenomenon that with further education, higher class status and bigger material wealth, human being tends to taste more complicated and complex products of art, having more elaborated aesthetic values. Here, we can adopt and adapt Marx who is saying that ideology of the dominant class forms the dominant thoughts in society, to the fact that those of dominant tastes, and dominant aesthetic preferences belong to the dominant classes. This is simply because of social mobility from lower classes towards dominant, ruling classes, which also many times requires the acquisition of the aesthetic preferences of the higher classes. They are generally more complex, complicated and the products of higher artistic talents. The value content of these far more sophisticated aesthetic products are higher according to the labour theory of value. For this reason, their prices are higher. To be able to consume them, more money, time and education are required. Accordingly, these products are socially consumed by the upper classes. A brief comparison of the main consumers of popular music with those of symphony music demonstrates that the dominant classes tend to prefer far more complicated art products and tastes that are the products of higher social labour. Our observation is valid at least for the aristocratic stratum of the bourgeois classes and for the highly educated stratum of the petty bourgeoisie.

We have seen that the absolute and relative characteristics of beauty and ugliness are socially determined. They are absolute in that they are closely related with and determined by the labour theory of value and they are relative in that social relation and the social position offers and creates different principles of beauty and ugliness.

Nonetheless, showing that art has absolute and relative characteristics is not sufficient for us to demonstrate the distinctive characteristics of art as in the case of proof principle in science.

In order to reveal this kind of principle for art, I suggest us to look at a man or woman seeing a great art product, which is acknowledged by art experts. It is not surprising to observe that this person can easily understand whether he or she faces a great art product. But how does he or she understand this? Common experience demonstrates that art product show us the reality or something imagined in a different way either by interpreting, distorting or changing somehow the subject matter the artistic product deals with. Nonetheless, we do not reach a definition since distorted or interpreted reality or images are not adequate to have make artistic product.

How this person recognizes that he or she has faced an art product? It is known that without having any definition obtained through the study of art, a common experience immediately makes us know that we see an artistic product. Without defining it consciously, this person is impacted by the different form the artistic product presents. Actually here we have gotten closer to the definition of art: a form different, original, attractive, and having a concern of beauty or ugliness we cannot find completely in scientific and religious products directly and completely. It is the impact of artistic form that helps understand the meaning of art. So, the task is to define this impact.

For a beginning I can suggest that art exerts a magical and a spiritual impact that distinguishes it from science, religion or any other forms of learning, knowing or expression. On the ground of this artistic impact, even an ordinary (meaning poorly educated) person, having only a common experience about art, can understand that he or she faces an art product. This product may be a cave drawing, a Michelangelo sculpture, a Dadaist painting, or a postmodern example of architecture. Our criterion for definition of art is the perception and understanding of an ordinary person who I assume has no education and training about art.

Though art shares many elements with religion in terms of magic and spirit, which are the holy manifestations of God, religion is a belief of masses that need magic and spirit that disappears in an ordinary everyday life. Magical and spiritual share close meaning. Magic is to create unbelievable changes showing talent and skill. It separates causes from effects and has an impact that something unknown can have. It is the distinctive aspect of magic in which all mediation process disappears so that relation between and change from cause and effect, reason and result becomes a secret. Spiritual makes the same by separating soul from body, idea from material. According to these definitions, art tends to get closer to religion. However, it is not surprising that both are deeply concerned with the infinite, absolute and eternal.

Religion transfers an imagined heaven to the hell of real life or vice versa. It requires obedience of the believer to the rules and assumptions of age old traditions and belief systems. Its other characteristics are that it establishes order, and promises a new eternal and secret world that can be reached at the end of this finite and profane life. Religion can be considered that it is the art and science, philosophy and morality, law and order of the masses. It explains, regulates, address, decides, develops, improves and helps the ordinary masses. You may have many gods or only one. Religion divides the universe into creator and created, infinite and finite, subject and object, ruler and ruled, powerful and weak, cosmos and chaos, nature and human, center and periphery. It can be seen that almost all dichotomies from which we suffer in any scientific activity have some origins in religious beliefs.

As for science, it can be observed in all systematically and theoretically developed learning processes which at the end remain faithful to the principle of proof. As stated above, without proofing, science cannot differentiate itself from art or religion. No need to say that scientific activity, like all other artistic and religious activities, can be seen in all systematic and theoretical human thought and act. A craftsman or an artist can work scientifically, using scientific methods and techniques. Similarly, a scientist may give his or her work an artistic form.

While science is based on the principle of proofs, religion just demands our belief, which means accepting without questioning and objecting, and when demanded by the believers, religion demonstrates no proof other than miracles, which show the supernatural events. On the other hand, art is related neither to the proof principle nor to beliefs. It is related and concerned with magical, glorious and respectful impact over senses and thoughts. It does this by creating so called "artistic" forms of any content, which may cover any idea, thought, sense or observation. The magical and spiritual impacts of artistic products are tests of whether we confront with art itself.

Thanks to and due to its impact, the product under question can be considered as the subject of art. In order to create this impact, an artist tries to develop the most impacting forms, which are an accumulation of art history, art education, art community, individual background, talents and skills.

Magical and spiritual created by artistic process acquires its power from establishing the old unity of science, art and religion of the remote past of human history. On the other hand, before modernity, science and philosophy on one side, art and religion on the other side, formed their own unities. Moreover, there were no strict demarcation lines between the two groups either. Even more, art, science, philosophy and religion formed an intellectual unity, which would dissolve through modernity into different specializations and compartments. This old unity was capable of creating the most magical and spiritual impacts over senses and thoughts. For this reason, it is not surprising that great artists and artistic products make us think of the great, magical and spiritual unity of art, science and religion. Otherwise, how can it be explained that even an uneducated person the imaginery is immediately influenced by the products of the great artists such as da Vinci, Brahms, Tolstoy or Picasso. Maybe more powerful impacts can be seen in the holy books, life of prophets and poetic and epic words spoken in the name of Gods and of their earthly representations.

It is a well known fact that modernity introduces a secularization process which dissolves the premature unity of religion, science and art. However, secularization just means putting the human being into the center and leaving God at the periphery of all change and development. Accordingly, creative power of God has been transferred and attributed to the creativity of human beings. The idea of creativity was hence secularized as well.

The magic and spirit of art stem from this secularization and transference of god's creativity into human beings. The impact of art on human senses, thoughts and behaviors originates, not only from the old unity of all learning processes seen since the cave man, but also from this secularization of god's assumed creativity during modernity.

Magic and spirit behind the creativity attributed to art comes from this complex past. However, they were transferred to art at the expense of science and philosophy. We observed that not only science and philosophy were separated from each other, but also science was separated from art, its creative capabilities as well. The result was the science which gave up the ideas such as absoluteness, totality, transhistorism and universality.

In our time, more or less all scientists dislike and reject these ideas, which have been already given up, they represent the rejection of science, they think. They instead prefer relativism, partiality, temporality and particularity. One that is empirical and proof based is thought to be the necessary beginning and ending of any scientific activity. Theory has been reduced to the summaries of the past researches and the methodology of the research apart from initial hypotheses put forward to start the scientific process.

On the other hand, art maintains the old tradition and tries to discover and demonstrate absoluteness, totality, transhistorism and universality. For this reason, its magical and spiritual impact can still help define what art is. It is a secularized religion and artist is the secular god. This idea can be supported by observing that the periods of humanism, renaissance, the great discoveries and the great artists were both products of and driving forces behind the secularization of the world during modernity.

Modern science owes its power and prestige to the secularization process of modernity. However, ironically, this process has also introduced ordinary research processes without creating magical impact on human sense, thoughts and behaviors. The exceptions are the great revolutionary scientists. Magical reputations Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx and Albert Einstein had, among others, come from their holistic approaches, insistence on universalism, transhistorical imagination and even their absolute claims. They, like artists, preferred creativity to understand the world of human beings and nature as a totality. Impacts of these kinds of scientists show that the great science insists on the maintenance of the old unities between science, philosophy, art and religion. However, this insistence does not reproduce the old characteristics of those forms of learning and understanding. Art, science and philosophy should no longer be the works of separated and isolated individual creators, but those of the individuals as autonomous members of a certain society of a certain historical era. They individually represent the theoretical understanding of the dispersed consciousness of their era. As for religion, it is clear that it lost its content even for the masses and maintains only its forms. Great science and great art deprive religion of its creator, God, re-appropriating the characteristics of god in the form of human intelligence, rationality and creativity.

Above, we have mentioned that religion divided "the universe into creator and created, infinite and finite, subject and object, ruler and ruled, powerful and weak, cosmos and chaos, nature and human, center and periphery" and stated that "almost all dichotomies from which we suffer in any scientific activity have some origins in religious beliefs". We can conclude that great art and great science do not suffer from these dichotomies. Especially art tries to surpass and transcend the divisions which religion introduces. The great scientists also maintain the same work.

The magical and spiritual impact of art stems from this attempt. Actually the impact of art is the definition of art itself. Science gets closer to this status of art when it tries to surpass and transcends the divisions and dichotomies which are the characteristics of any religion.

When Nietzsche said that if god exists we do not, if we exist, god does not; he seems to have added that, if god exists, art and science do not, if they exist, god does not.

In sum, art, science and religion are closely related forms of human intellectuality. We can differentiate them in terms of proof principle, magical-spiritual impact and the idea of God. Art and science competes with the idea of God in different manners. Former is the secular and individualized form of religion while the latter puts forward the idea of proof which does not exist in any religion. On the other hand, science and art can be differentiated on the grounds of both the proof principle and that science has and magical and spiritual impact that art has. However, this sort of crystallization that has taken place with and through modernity may turn into a new synthesis of art, science and religion. This may be realized in a world, which is simultaneously magical, spiritual, aesthetic, moral and rational.