

## ART IS TEMPORAL

Art is eternal. Beauty is pure pleasure. Genius in creation and taste in appreciation are one.—One is accustomed to encounter such time-honored aesthetic views and one takes them often without questioning whether they adequately honor time. On the following pages a different approach to art will be outlined; on its horizon these views and many others which need not be cited now, will appear as false. Some hallowed names can be invoked as authority for them. So much the worse. *Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas.*

Considerations surrounding the sophisticated and complex concept of aesthetic value, human longings for permanence and for community, unjustified claims of equality—these and other factors tend toward acceptance of some such view of art as this: the artists and their public share alike in aesthetic enjoyment which is the common thread of their spiritual conversation on terms of partnership across the ages. This overwhelming tendency may be shaken if not shattered by the asking of such awkward yet indispensable questions as: How is it that the Hellenes, inferior to none on the fields of art, used to conceive their artists, specifically poets, as “makers” of things, and not to aim at distin-

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guishing them from artisans? Whence the artistic anxiety and rebellion at being so much "in advance" of contemporaries? Is it "permitted" to be unashamedly bored in certain regions of art history? These questions do not seem at first glance to have anything in common. How they belong together may become clearer when art is touched by the all-embracing arm of *time*—which is man's own arm.

The thesis to be developed here is that in all human art there are essential dividing yet not alienating phases grounded in future, present and past. In varying ways the same men may participate in all these phases, to varying extent. The names used for these phases will be: *creation, experience, and history*. But it is not names that matter.



The first theme to be sounded will be that of the *object*. The word has been chosen as relatively safe in not taking too much for granted. It does not presuppose the status of *objet d'art*, nor yet in English of a work of art, since what such a status may mean remains to be questioned.

Imagine yourself in the act of composing, in whatever medium. That which will result is not yet there, but from "nowhere" it presses and demands to be effected, by you. You have your intimations, sketches, wishes; they are not the object. What is there is of course a quantity of physical things: a blank page or canvas, some clay or bricks, plus the ink in your pen, the colors in your tubes, the utensils of labor. These are given to you by physis; they are not your object. It is the latter which is the task of art. It is up to you to com-*pose*, and that means to "put together," those physical materials. How? If you knew that, you would be ready. The relevance of asking: "how?" indicates that there is a way, that an arbitrary manner, one as good as another, will not do. But because you have to grope, because it must be *your* object, you have no recipe handy to follow. What is to arise is now only an *object-to-be*. You hope to be the one who will make it into an object. The resistance of the medium, of your own unreadiness, impatience and tiredness, lies all in the not-yet-there. But you persist, and something emerges, the page

is scribbled over, the clay takes shape. What is there now? That which you have to work over, remake, align, improve. What is there now is less an object than an objection, "thrown across" your striving. This is why you hate so much, but submit to, the job of correcting and emending. Step by step, there is less to be made, the end is nearing, it is finally there: the object. Whether you are satisfied or just exhausted, you accept it, at least for the time being. There is no longer an object-to-be for you. But what does that mean? No less than that your intimacy with it is ended, you are no longer a maker making and justifying this name. Except for the understandable pride not unmixed with anxiety, you have exhausted your privilege and now become—a member of the public whose many-keyed judgment will let itself be heard and may drown your own voice.

Artistic creation concerns exclusively an object-to-be. When such an entity is no longer in question, the making is over and the artist no longer enjoys an exclusive advantage over others contemplating the object which is now there for them as well as for him. Creation is a bond from the future. The inequality between the creating genius and the appreciative public is so likely to be forgotten and denied, because it has no ground in the present. Imaginative proving and improving of the present object appeals as much to its author as to all critics with taste.

Now take a place in the anonymous crowd of art lovers: at an actual exhibition in Paris, Venice or New York, at a performance in a theatre or hall, or with a book in hand in the privacy of your room. What is there for you? An object you witness. An *object on display*: it plays with your imagination, it disports itself within your senses, it yields to you but in a challenging way. You appropriate it in your own great or limited capacity and may rightly reject anyone else's interpretation of it. The object is fully available to you; why should you need an interfering judgment? On the other hand, you just *ex-perience* it: you sound in the depth of something "being born to you." The object is present, you have not finished with it. It may yield novelties, even if it is not your first acquaintance with it. Can you be sure you have grasped the total meaning of it, if you do not know what it was to-be? You know of schemes and groupings of such objects, seemingly, as this. But how do you know that precisely *this*, which is

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available to you, is the romantic expression, the perfect form, the stylized cry of faith? The critic and his standards are at hand; you may be guided by them or insist on your own taste alone. You are equal to others as long as the object is available to you, showing itself but inviting to further mysteries. The display is the life of this object for you; it must be continuous.

Artistic experience, for which the German word "Erleben" is more telling, is live being-with-the-object. The primary consideration for it is not whether a member of the public comes armed with a guidebook, an elaborate program, or even an aesthetic encyclopedia, whether he relies upon systematized judgments, or on the contrary enters empty-handed and naive into the intercourse with the object; what matters is whether he *enters*. This is the democratic equal chance for all opened in art. It is a general invitation for continuous presence. The object need not be here for anyone a "work" of art, in the conscious sense of its having been worked out, laboriously but marvelously, by a single maker. Nor need it be an exquisite and precious "objet d'art," to be appreciated only by an élite; to claim that as a standard is to fall prey to snobbism which predetermines experience. What the object must be is *present*, taking hold of the beholder, playing with him in its display with no ulterior aim, with no imposed termination or determination.

And now imagine yourself engaged in research, paging through disintegrating manuscripts, digging for relics underground, or simply walking in hushed reverence through a museum. That is a house of the Muses, and they were born of Mnemosyne—remembrance. What is now there for you is to be re-membered, re-collected, re-called from oblivion, from misunderstanding, even from absence. You are a historian: you have to direct your whole devoted effort toward presenting the object, making it live again. Therefore you cannot claim that the object is present. Of course, again something is there: the physical shapes and materials. But that is never sufficient for a historian of *art*. Here your task is to get the object into full display, to let it live and speak—now, to make be-holding possible. And up to a point, this task is an ideal not to be fulfilled completely. Because your object is past, surpassed, and instead of approaching it is moving away from you with time. Time which favors you as a

creator concerned with that which is to-be, works against you as a historian concerned with *what has-been object*. If you were not human, the task would be impossible, the past would be dead. Being historical, you, a man, can face your perhaps overambitious aspiration with a certain tenacity. That which has-been-object is not fallen into nothingness, at least not for you, otherwise you would not be a historian of art. However difficult, your task is to re-cover the object with the mantle of awareness. In order to do it, you try to understand what has been an object displayed and present to others, long ago, you try to collect together how, where, and why it was present to them, as well as what it was to-be for him who made it. Never able to change the status of what has been into a living presence in display, you can still let it play together, for you and your contemporaries, with what is there now constituting objects of art, and also with what is yet to be. You cannot live or make anyone else live now with some cannibal daemonology, nor with Hellenic assurance, not even with the amorous elegance of ancien régime; yet you can affect artistic experience and creation now by re-calling into awareness African totems, Athenian pottery, the manuscripts of Casanova or Crébillon fils.

Art history is serving the Muses well, in the least hopeful and most forget-full assignments. It is concerned with recollecting that which has been the object of art, first in creation, then in experience. It is therefore unavoidably turned toward the past, but refuses to admit the death of that past. The question may be asked how to draw a line between objects of art which are still fully present and those which have been surpassed; to that each questioner has to supply his own answer. Obviously it is not just the datable age of any object that decides the issue universally, since anything *aged* anyhow is, strictly, sinking into the past. One viewpoint could claim that American literature of the thirties belongs to what has-been, because of disillusionment after World War Two; another, that classical sculpture is fully alive in the present, despite the Dark Ages. Because the past, if not infinite, is at any rate inexhaustible, the historian must make a selection. Here the right of making selections is again equal for all, but on the other hand the power of recovering and re-presenting what has been as though it were still there, in other words the

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actual performance of art history, may be only an attainment of very few.

It may be supposed, as an objection against the preceding paragraphs, that there is some faulty asymmetry in counterposing an object-to-be, measurable in terms of only days or months of creation, to what has-been-object, extending into historical centuries and epochs. What can be said in reply to this may serve to clarify pertinent thoughts. First, asymmetry need not be objectionable, not even aesthetically, and certainly not with reference to something as non-arbitrarily given as the "temporal shape" of art. Second, the temporal status of an object-to-be is not to be exhausted by pointing to the actual if intermittent creative labor of artists; it is rather what artists, as well as visionaries, moralists and the like, have to draw upon in order to justify themselves as such, but how long and how often they bind themselves that way, is quite another question. Third, this question rests upon categories which have not been introduced above, viz. quantitative ones, while the discussion has not treated of entities which can be quantitatively, measurably, scientifically handled, only of qualities, future, past, present; these are perhaps indeed qualities par excellence, co-ordinate yet never com-mensurable; in human experience they are pure qualia which cannot be commingled, however close they may be brought, they withstand each other, *toto coelo* differing and un-unifiable. Is such temporal thinking difficult to rationalize? Still, it is very relevant to art, though not necessarily to science. And while men may or may not live rationally, they cannot help living temporally; from that there is no escape even in madness. Perhaps only in mathematics; are qualities negated there—or neglected?



The second theme to emerge from the same phases of art will be the *disposition* of man in one of the situations already outlined. The word "disposition" is not to be understood psychologically as meaning no more than a mental state or feeling; rather, it refers to the whole condition of the person concerned—but not alone, the relation of that person to the object—but insofar as that concerns him. It will receive more light in what follows.

When as a creator of art you are composing an object-to-be, how are you disposed with regard to it? A simplified but unanswerable way of putting this question would be to ask: where is it? Your object is obviously nowhere as yet. Nevertheless, far from assenting to its nothingness, you have to acknowledge a very positive disposition of your own towards it. In an indefinitely metaphorical sense, you can say that it is still within, within yourself. Your reaching-for, your activity physical as well as mental, your spatial motion even, is all pregnant with it. You walk "toward" it, you smile "at" it, you are weighed "down" by its awkwardness, you let its subtleties slip "through." The object imposes its demands upon you along with its attractions. But is this description not too onesided? It is you, after all, who are so thoroughly involved in your own composition, there is no possible pressure from outside. You are working toward it, that is, you are working toward yourself working toward it, toward yourself making yourself a maker of things. Who says: this is "not yet" it? You do. You want to make it this way and not another, you expect it to be still better thus still harder for yourself. The whole scope of your being disposed toward the object-to-be can be understood as your *im-position*. It is your own involvement to such a degree that you may not know any longer whether you would be still yourself if you abandoned your creation, whether you could give it up or destroy it as something alien, whether it is at all destructible as long as you remain alive. But this imposition is also your glory, your exuberant advantage over the world, over all other people: it is of your making.

The disposition of the creating artist is such that it is impossible to distinguish between "him" and "it," between passivity and activity as within this relation. The object-to-be is his, not by right of an overpowering grasp but by intertwined belonging. This has been called an "imposition," but only in this neutral fashion, since the artist has in him both suffering patency and victorious agency. It is understood in the sense of what Nietzsche called "dancing in self-imposed chains." Considered by any other than the creator's own self, however, his making of his object-to-be appears as an enviable and unique activity, in comparison with which others remain as a merely passive background.

How is it with you now when you are a spectator or a listener,

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what is your disposition with regard to the object? The object is displayed to you from outside, it is somewhere in external space, it is not yours exclusively. Between you and it there remains a distance never to be wholly traversed, and it is not a simply spatial distance, either. You can leave the talk of perfection to those who think they are paying their membership in the aesthetic community by some such phrases: "It is all perfect, but—I love especially..." which is presumably more perfectly perfect. If you are open enough, you know that the allegro remains for you unrelated to the gloom of the preceding adagio, that the splash of red on upper right appears to you slightly vulgar, that you find no ground for the conspiracy against the hero. To the object which is "thrown across" or even "against" your experience, you stay in *op-position*. But this is not to be understood as conflict or hostility which would make display impossible; perhaps best on the model of the House of Commons: opposition which is loyal and tied to the party it opposes not only by the code of fair play but by a sense of *common* endeavor in the same direction through opposed approach. Your opposition in the distance of the object is involved in your approaching to it, in your aim to penetrate into what it has been made-to-be, in your experiencing it. And so the object also constitutes an *im-position* upon you. You envy the activity of the creator and you wish to identify yourself with him as closely as possible: does this not justify your restless search for what the artist was trying to express? In your eager beholding and being-held-with the object you forgive and try to forget its imperfections which make it alien. What you do not forgive is its alienness, its not being yours; that you want to dispose of entirely. You accept the imposed chains and pretend they fit you and essay to dance and play in them. How strong is your talent for forgetting—yourself?

In the experience of art the disposition of the person is in a way dialectical. There is in it as much of passionate involvement in the present object as of distance from it merely because it must remain an "it." These antithetical tendencies are referred to as imposition and opposition. But it would seem that in case of genuine experience of art there is not anything as simple as a straight antithesis, because by the nature of human reality while the opposition to the object is imposed upon the individual, the



imposition is opposed as long as he is this individual. Mystics may have some facilities for resolution here; ordinary humans have not. There is no doubt that while this dialectical tension cannot be disregarded, the ideal of artistic experience is some union transcending it. Perhaps the all-unifying illumination of mysticism is nothing else but the reifying of this ideal; the author has no mystical qualifications. It would be difficult to label with a single term the described disposition of a person experiencing art. The word "com-position" might come closer than any other to fulfilling this purpose. Unfortunately, it has, also on these pages, its use in describing the creation of art; and whatever the mystics aim at, to equate here creation with experience after what has been said already would be absurd.

A simpler if less hopeful disposition awaits you in the task of a historian of art. The object has-been artistic; as such, it is no longer and is nowhere, in a sense different from an object-to-be. It has less of the negative character of not-yet-there-at-all, because it has already been created and experienced. But for you living now it has been surpassed; this is the challenge of your situation. The surpassed object is what you want to re-cover, re-member from its disintegration in the past. Its sinking into nothing is *what you are op-posed to*. The striving is yours, that which only has-been an object must be supported by you, not vice versa: it does not im-pose itself upon you, except in the measure as you already have committed yourself to opposing its own passing. When distance in present experience is either recommended or lamented, you may well smile and wonder how: the incomparable distance from that which is no more, that is your element, what you can object and despair about. As long, however, as your disposition is maintained historically, you must be opposed to that element, and opposed actively. In actuality what you oppose is your own and your contemporaries' forgetting and forgoing of everything to which they owe their art but which without support is falling into extinction. You have this active task now, and a task not on your own behalf: you assume a stance for the common past while you yourself cannot help your distance from it. The threats you can not eliminate against the object surpassed are those of misplacement, mis-interpretation, evanescence, chaos, all tending toward annihilation. In such a disposition you cannot dream of

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identifying yourself with the maker. His chains have slipped down, his dance faded away. Your opposing intent is to initiate a *second* dance, even if it means forging new chains. A tradition of sacrifice must be yours: learning to relight the splendors not just of caliphs and pharaohs but of obscured Aztecs, Hittites, perhaps of Atlantides—and knowing that these are not yours. Imposition of objects from the past upon your age's art may be your goal; in all deserved pride of achievement this imposition persists as external also for you, from such past as you are opposing.

The characteristic disposition in art history is then an opposition which aims at being imposed, but the latter cannot be taken for granted. The surpassed object having a quasi-dead quality, the revivifying efforts of the historian cannot bridge the gap distancing it from him. He must suffer from it the more, the stronger his devotion and even the more successful he is in representing what has been. Because the more he "lives" in the past, the more poignantly he must experience that he does not live in the past. This inescapable failure of his activity need not be vain, however.

The clue to the appreciation of the above conceptions of imposition and opposition lies probably in the analysis of seemingly simple words "mine" and "not-mine." But how these can be applied, elusively and paradoxically, in concrete human dispositions, can be seen only by reference to what temporal qualities offer. Thus the creator of art is turned toward what he could call "mine," except that it is *not there yet*. The person experiencing art is confronted with what *is already* indubitably there for him, and precisely therefore, however much he would long to call it "mine," he cannot; nor as long as his experience is genuine, can he renounce it as "not-mine." The art historian is recovering what is *no longer* available but has been, so he must honestly acknowledge it as necessarily "not-mine;" but since consenting to its alienness in his name and for others would be to let it altogether not-be, his recalling leads him to remake it as only vicariously "mine." This statement in terms of personal possession should leave no doubt about the qualitative uniqueness for man of future, present and past; and their relevance to art suggests art's position with the care-full striving for possession in human existence.

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The third theme which can be heard from the incommensurable phases of art creation, experience, and history, is that of *rules*. A critical, almost a fighting word in various ways within the domain of art. May the following discussion help to remove some of the difficulties surrounding its legitimacy or illegitimacy in artistic life.

You are composing an object-to-be, imposed upon you by yourself. It is to be your object. That which is not-yet there cannot be already bound and characterized by present and available rules. Further, that which is not-yet wholly yours, is not susceptible to your ruling it; it resists, it is unruly. By the time you acquire a rule over it, it will have been made. But if it is to be made as yours, you are the only one who could rule it. If you let yourself follow, imitate, be ruled by rules of other people, other objects, you can never justify your claim as a maker, neither to others, nor to yourself. If you make something that nicely fits into the rules of past and present, you deny your creative ambition, since you allow the future the character of a delayed copy—is this creation? Of course, how you are, how you approach your task, cannot be postulated in terms of an abrupt beginning. You have been, consciously and unconsciously, exposed to the influence of the work of others and of their rules. This cannot be denied, unless hypocritically. On the other hand, you can only regard the other rules as suggestive aid, not as a substitute for what you are to give of yourself. You dare not accept those rules *qua rules*. And yet you have to rule the object, otherwise your toil will continue forever unaccomplished. Is there an exit from this predicament? One thing is clear: the rule is not to be antecedent to the object. The artist who has no other “inspiration” for working but to produce “a sonnet,” “a classical symphony,” “a monument,” deserts the ranks he professes to advance. If you do not want to detract from your expected triumph, you cannot diminish, shortcut, sterilize the awe-full encounter which is to deserve it. What makes this encounter full of awe is that it faces the un-ruly, un-orderly, chaotic as yet—because it is-not yet. The complete involvement in the object which is yet to be, which means in your own future, is hauling the object out of that not-

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yet, creating it yourself, in other words *shaping the rule* for this very object, your own rule over it. That is your chain and your dancing rhythm, that is the meaning of the claim that this object is "to-be" as yours. This is what forthcoming experience of others will try to get at and envy, what succeeding history will try to re-collect fully and fail. The collection, the imposition of this object is yours alone; this is your rule, if you are a creator.

Treating of creation in art may not altogether avoid the significance of its conceptual descent from *creatio ex nihilo*. While the purely ontological question of nothingness cannot be raised directly since the artist creates from what is physically given, the fact that an artist is turned toward a future which is to be but is not yet dictates a stern demand. It is closing one's eyes to the futurity of the future, when one permits "creation" subject to what is and has been the rule. Rules must be rules over something; is future some thing now, other than what is yet to be? And are those who stake their lot on the future, the human creators, in any way exempt from this demand? Naturally, one does not expect every painting to initiate a revolution equal to the impressionists', nor every musician to be a Beethoven, although it will be only substantiating his creative power, if he stands up to emulate the greatest. But the ability to rule his object on his own, and that can mean *both* agreeing and breaking with former rules but never in subjection to them, is a *conditio sine qua non* for an artist. The final absurdity of teaching creativity remains to be taken seriously in American education.

What is to be your regard for rules in experiencing art? The object is present in display and you are trying to sound its depth. You aim at some ideal union with it, at harmony such as you imagine to have been achieved between it and its maker. To the extent in which this is your clear objective you must then also exercise independence from rules and standards of others, emulating the creator who did it. But you can realize the remoteness of such a goal and recoil before the awe-full test the artist had to face alone. Then you legitimately reach for company and guidance, questioning critics, theories of style, comparisons of various experiences. Still, this is not, nor could it be an *automatic* process, as long as *art* is in question. If this is a sonata in continuation of Mozart, a novel such as Stendhal, Dostoevski, Conrad wrote, then it is

definitely a failure; but was it to-be such a composition? If an architect's product is meant to have four walls and a roof, then he who planned this building was not an architect; or was he? Will any completely up to date aesthetic guidebook decide such questions for you? You should not let it, while you realize that it may "cover" all possible specimens but only up to now, and that this object which you face now has been created in a turn to the future. Wanting to experience it thoroughly, you must let it be your experience; and that means an ineradicable element of lonely suspension between this creative challenge and the rear-guard strength of rules you know. The rule is born with the work. Your problem is to *apply* it, to harmonize it with what you had seen, heard or read, to get used to it. Your problem is to move against the opposition to which this unknown shape disposes you, and to impose it upon yourself as though it was yours naturally. Your problem is to overcome the alien aspect of this being someone's artificial creation and, in the Kantian phrase, "to experience art as if it was nature."

Rules in artistic experience are both indispensable and insufficient. On account of the average aesthetic frailty of persons who experience art, it would be folly to dispense with critics and critical standards or even to object against such aid as they provide. They are not only a necessary evil but even not quite an evil. On the other hand, what must be denounced is a tendency toward the tyranny of rules. With regard to present experience of art, it is not merely a matter of disapproving such tyranny but of showing as a point of calm fact that it would be self-defeating through prevention of independent experiences. If critical judgments of an art exhibition had to be accepted by all spectators, such an exhibition might as well be visited once by critics and subsequently only by parrots trained to repeat on exit the critical words. An understanding critic dares not presume to utter a complete and universal judgment of a work, though he might secretly wish for it; because he understands that all his rules reach not what is to-be, that they must be applied in the present tentatively, unless the future is to be just like the present. *That* would put an end to art and to its critics.

A different situation confronts you, if you are an art historian. The object for you is not present, it has been. There is no pos-

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sibility for you to harmonize in concrete interplay with the forcible imposition of someone's expression. You have to make the object speak; without you it will recede into dark silence. Your horizon extends into chaos, too, but not the chaos of that which is yet to-be; rather the chaos which you cannot possibly accept as sheer negation, since it is the bourn of what is now, the lost matrix through which has been made all that you witness in the present. You cannot suffer such loss; and yet that which only has been gives you scant support, you have gradually to re-impose your own reasoning self upon those fragile materials. To re-collect them, you have to give them a pattern, not exactly the pattern they bore when they were present: the pattern of your own reasoning. And so the rules which are born in creation of art, which are being applied in its present experience, must be *rationalized* in its history. You know quite well that this is a substitute, that how you recover and rearrange your relics differs from how they were in their youthful spring. You have to reason on your own whence Minoan or Inca art took its presence; being neither a Cretan nor a Peruvian and, what is more crucial, not of those days, you cannot pretend that you are restoring its original meaning, not even when dealing with much closer periods and works. But you have a certain advantage over them: when their art was present, new, tentative, their pattern of it could only be in the process of uncertain application. Your rules have the weight of historical distance, and no matter how false they might be, they are still a tremendous conquest from the abyss of oblivion. Your rules bridge the surpassed objects and those you live with. Your rules, almost like those of the artists themselves, cannot be challenged except by someone with equal opportunity and courage for reconstruction.

The rules of art history have thus a privileged status. Only they can treat confidently of the limits of romanticism and classicism, of proper form for a fugue, an allegory, an ode, of how a genre or style arises and degenerates. That theirs is only a second rhythm is unavoidable, since what is not surpassed is not susceptible yet of rational pattern. It follows that every critic worthy of the name must be a historian of art: without a good perspective into the past his present pronouncements have no authority. Thus Aristotle's dictum: "Beauty depends on size and order" need

not at all be questioned, when it is understood that its validity extends historically into those directions where the *appropriate* size and order can be rationally determined, because the view is complete. The present taste, be it exquisite, is not a rival of historical judgment and its rules. One may now dislike and miss something in the Italian Quattrocento; nevertheless, what it did achieve rests in the hands of art historians. It is up to them to re-present what has been and its rules with such appeal to their own time that it should be capable of playing within the imposition of present creation and experience. Their success cannot be guaranteed; if it were, it would again mean tyranny.

The above outline may be used to clarify the issue of rules in art, where equal zeal and insistence appear both in the cause of a search for, and in that of the right to the breach of, rules. It indicates that rigidity of rules is *impossible* in that phase of art which is turned toward the future, because of its future character; there is, after all, the question of induction even in science and strict prediction of uniform future is admissible only in abstract thought systems. It indicates, on the contrary, the inescapable *need* of rules in that phase of art which is turned toward the past, again because of its passed character; that which is not sustained in human remembrance becomes for humanity such as if it never were, and how the presence of the present is due to sources out of mind can only be reconstructed by reasoning. It indicates the intermediate and *fluid* status of rules in that phase of art which is turned toward the present, because that is no more than a threshold on which man is uncertainly balanced between what is to be and what has been; to regard the present as complete in itself and so determinable by rules is a temptation to which some great minds yielded, and after them the masses. Despite the loud arrogance of some journalists, there is no such thing as contemporary history.

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The perceptive may have observed by now that this approach to art draws its original inspiration from the thought of Martin Heidegger. This is frankly and thankfully acknowledged. It would be but poor gratitude to Heidegger's disclosure of human

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temporality, if the author of these pages were to leave the self-contradictory impression of each of the three *ec-stasies* of future, past, and present, resting within itself and alien to the others. Such an impression may have been produced thus far, because the intent of the preceding discussion was primarily to bring out the specific qualitative differences of the temporal phases of art which have been called creation, history and experience. Their separated images must be collected: already on the first page it was asserted that these three phases of art are "dividing yet not alienating."

A beginning of this collecting task can well be made with a paraphrase of what is in Heidegger's thought a crucial expression in terms of "letting-be." Thus a pervading thread of aspirations concerning art can be expressed with varying accent in the phrase: "You let it be." The accent in case of creation is put on "*you*." It is you who bring the object out of its not-yet-being, but not out of nothing, only out of the changeable physis; you are to collect and rule it by your power of com-position; it is to-be yours, intimately, indistinguishably, your im-position upon the world. In case of experience, the accent is put on "*let it*." You, but also everyone else equal to you, let the object play in your awareness; you let it impose its external presence upon you and stay with it; you let it show its depth, with the aid of rules only part of the way since you are endeavoring to transcend your op-position to it and to let it rule you. The accent is put on "*be*" in case of history. You are actively devoted to the surpassed object and realizing your temporal op-position, without a personal claim upon it, you undertake to save it; you wish to re-collect it and let it live again, re-imposing it upon what is available and to come; without your reasoning reconstruction of its rule, it would not surmount the gravity of what has-been once and would be irrecoverably lost, for men it would be no more.

Such variations on this one expression suggest that however incommensurable the temporal phases of art have to remain, their objectives are not in discord with each other. But with even the most apt phrases guiding to certain thoughts, one must not hypnotize oneself with their marvelous consonance but rather think through what they call out.

In the human domain of art, what the phrase: "You let it



be” evokes is a paramount quest for *abiding identity* in the face of time. The very same object is, or should be—if artistic aspirations can be fulfilled—that which first is to-be by the human hand of a creator, that which human experience is-with in the living presence of it, finally that which has-been but will not die thanks to the efforts of human historians. From the past to the present to the future there is a gulf man must put up with; but the same gulf, no more and no less, divides man’s history, experience and creation of art, and it is not impassable. Unless the conception of abiding identity is a fruit of a hopeless nightmare, Humean rather than human, the phases of man’s art, qualitatively irreconcilable as they are, need not be without relation or utterly alien to each other. And indeed there are relations among them which do not affect each one’s own status but in some measure assuage the temporal quest of man.

First, let it be said what relations are not possible in view of the preceding discussion. Someone might think that here an obliteration has been effected of some bridging categories which should be reinstated. Thus future art should be distinguished from art of the future, present art from art of the present, and past art from art of the past. The former term in each of these pairs is indeed temporally divergent, but the latter term in them is super-temporally unifying: art of the future is just like that of the present and of the past, there is a common essence in all three. But such a statement leads to what has been here questioned at the very outset, some continuing and successfully communicated discourse across and over the ages, an immutable eternity of art. This must be rejected. To speak of art of the future as though it had to be in community with art experienced now is to beg a question logically, aesthetically, and above all temporally. The main characteristic of art of the future is that it does not exist, and never could—since it would have to be present. Quite another aim is pursued in speaking of future art, or more precisely of *future-turned art*, which is creation. It is the autonomous privilege of the creators to decide whether anything, and if so what, is to-be in art: without them, the “eternal” essence of art would yield to nothing. With reference to art of the past, what is again overlooked is the pastness of the past, its loss, the complete impossibility of viewing it as though it were just like the present. Without its

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rescue by historians, art of the past would be unknowable and incommunicable. Granted that historians have to approximate past art from their present temporal location, try to conceive it as they now can; but they are not as naive as to suppose that they are dealing with it from the same point of view which belonged to those for whom that art was present. That "essence" has passed away. When past art, or *past-turned art*, is spoken of, it cannot be anything else but art history, re-collecting but not collecting, rationalizing but not experiencing it live. The conception of art of the present is not illegitimate, but it probably includes art which is being created now and so is not yet, as well as what in art is but recently past and so is vaguely and undemonstrably held as close enough, as if temporal distances were as simple as spatial. The minimality of the present is hard to entertain and the only fashion of making it strict with regard to art is to speak of present art from the angle of those who do experience it now, the actual public whose *living turn is being-with art* objects. Art recently created which no one is experiencing—in what sense is it present? Thus here the "eternal essence" of continuing intercourse can be extinguished between the burning cup offered by the creator and the disdainful lips of the public.

What has been mainly attacked in the above paragraph is the notion of something common in art above time, which is *taken for granted*, idealized Platonically as necessary and safe from destruction. Art of Aeschylus and Pheidias is "the same" as ours—what baseless presumption! Art must go on infinitely—what reckless optimism! What if art were to be suffocated by "necessary facts" of an inimical world, and quite soon? Art works are victoriously "imperishable"—here one does not know: is it innocence voiced or bad faith? What of all those works that have perished? Due to criticism—or worse: ignorance—or worse: brutality—or worse: fanaticism!

No eternity can be gratuitously assumed for man, nor can it be for his art. It is therefore quite a different proposition when one wishes to speak of *abiding identity in art as a human quest*, carried on human hands. There are relations bridging future, past and present, but they must be built up to be there, by men who are concerned with the creation, history and experience of

art. Of these a few words must now be added—for consolation or encouragement?

How an artistic object comes to be remains to a certain extent a mystery. In view of the serious treatment of creation attempted here, this is to be expected. And so not much could or should be determined about the relation of the artist to his history and experience. But in a cautious vein it can be claimed that neither the creator nor his creation begins from nothing. The artist will have had a tradition and a schooling from nature and from other men. How great is this debt to laborious historians and to those who enabled him to experience aesthetically, is not to be measured. But that such a debt is in question, that in his purely creative work he *assumes* something of the "same" which has been handed over to him by others, is not to be doubted, even when his work is as toweringly his own as Shakespeare's.

The picture is clearer in case of historians, whose task out of the past is not conceivable in terms of the past only. Art historians must make a selection from near chaos. In the selection of what is to be re-membered, they will try to deal with *only that which once was* genuinely creative and which has been genuinely experienced, providing for possible admiration. Only in those terms can they appeal to the present public and re-create a future for their objects by influencing those which are still to-be. The decisive importance of this task cannot be too strongly affirmed. Because it is up to those engaged in art history and coining its rules, to select past artists from mere artisans; present experience of the makers' products is too tentative and fluid to achieve that. It may be that because the ancient Hellenes were much less conscious of history and more cast upon present harmonies, they could speak indifferently of artists and artisans, as though these could not be told apart. The possibility of such a selective judgment seems to depend upon the objects' being covered up by the passing of time with only some of them being worthy of re-recovery. Here also lies the clue to the solitude of greatness in creators who suffer in knowing themselves to be far in advance of their present public. A gap thus arises between creation and experience, the objects lapsing into the past *before* having a chance of being immediately present, unlike those which made less of a leap toward the future and are consequently more acces-

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sible directly. The creator is thus made impotent by time and has to place his future in the hands picking through the past. He can only hope that it will be the "same" objects of his making which the historian will re-cognize as still worthy of a future. Is there a more adequate meaning of artistic "greatness" than what is found abiding with and through other men? The secret of its future then would be that it must, like a phoenix, be reborn from the ashes of its own past. Are we not so strongly inclined to believe in the "immortality" of art especially of that glory which was Hellas, precisely because it was revived from that frightful tomb of forgetting centuries between the fall of Rome and the fall of Constantinople? But no remembrance can be postulated. The historian is privileged to make his selections as one man, and so to introduce his individual failings and manias. What he does not pick is relinquished to death. What he does pick still has no guarantee of life, since his re-imposition may not be successful. The men living now may legitimately thrust the resurgent objects back into their grave through the most humanly death-like disposition: boredom.

And the present—is it neglected in this strange intimacy of "sameness" between the past and the future? But how could it be? The present is the threshold of meeting for those two: without it the future would be cut off and the past inevitably dead. Therefore only just so much needs to be said about the place of present art. Without art experience art history would be impossible, deprived of a point d'appui, and art creation would be absurd, although it *could* go on, pointlessly. The experience of art by living humanity, with its groping and blundering admiration, is thus not only the division between future and past, but also their bond of appeal, not always received. There is the link actualizing the identity of art in life. If only that link were more reliable! Still, temporal art cannot do without it. While therefore Croce exaggerates in his hopeful equation of the power of genius with the power of experiencing taste, and one cannot literally accept his dictum: "Homo nascitur poeta", since this implies idealistically that all human spirits are by birthright capable alike of making and experiencing art as their expression, there is a more fragile insight in Hölderlin's line: "Dichterisch wohnet der Mensch auf dieser Erde." This, on the ground of the foregoing

interpretation, can be paraphrased as: "Artistically abides man on this earth." Art abides through men living temporally in their world.

Not only are there such external relations among the strictly incommensurable temporal phases of art, but there are phenomena describable as the *offering of gifts* from one phase to another. The gift of experience to history is that of familiarity, which is the enveloping aura facilitating the historian's progress. One could think that familiarity of objects remains strictly in the present, that this is what one encounters in experience more and more. This would be a mistake: familiar objects are those already surpassed and one notices them less and less; as time passes, they recede back. But men turned toward the surpassed find in them great support for communication; familiarity is in their domain a means toward revival. What history in turn presents as its offering to creation is technique. Using capacity of rules and patterns, of the reasonable order of objects, is no mean contribution to ease the creative toil. But again it must be emphasized that technique, while originating in the past, is nevertheless the property of men turned toward the future, to do with or without as they please. Technique is the means toward objects to-be. The overambitious historian who would begrudge his own gift to the artist and wish to retain it for its own sake, is ill placed in his endeavor. And finally the offer of the creator to the present experiencing public, that which is the means toward the abiding of art, is his endowment of man with vanquishing joy over life: his *en-joyment*.

Of joy in art experience with all its nuances, from the light welcoming smile and withheld breath to raptures of delight imposed upon the rest of existence, no words are necessary. If the author did not appreciate such enjoyment, these pages would never have been written. But for a sober counterbalance, it may not be superfluous to add something against the false view that beauty we find in art is a sheer positive acquisition with no negative side, that no payment is made for it, that it is definable as pure pleasure. This is true of no phase in art. The man who gives himself to genuine ex-perience pays, on various occasions, in various ways: with his effort toward harmony, with his envy of the artist, with regret that so little time is his for useless

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spending, with the pain of being affected deep in his heart by a true revelation of his own passing existence. There is in him the historian's sense of loss of that which recedes, the Faustian impossibility of making the beautiful moment linger, the anxiety about things to come never equaling this. There is some cruelty toward the artist in imagining his hard work, his violating rule over himself in making the object come from the unreachable. There is the suffering passion toward the object which as for Kierkegaard lives by tension and uncertainty, the suspension in vacuo between imposition and opposition, the self-denying desire to get it all in, to satiate oneself, and yet to persist in appropriating rather than in complete owning of it. There is the awareness that pearls are born from pain. This is all in the context of *passions of time*, which the experiencing person undergoes only in a much lighter form, compared with the creator and the historian. If someone thinks that time passing is necessary and therefore the easiest thing which involves no striving, he forgets that whatever is necessary is not at all thereby made easy. That man must experience and exist in time does not mean that he does not suffer from this most universally human phenomenon. To speak of any experience and in particular of deep experience of beauty in art as of "pure" pleasure is to yield to an abstracted longing for perfection, complete subsistence, having done with passing, an eternal ideal of non-temporality. It is *but* an ideal and the *striving toward it*, in art as elsewhere in human existence, *is temporal*. Thus to speak of enjoyment in art as pure is to close one's eyes entirely to the tragic horizons of humanity, and to bar that enjoyment which is tragic and thereby, as much as despite of it, is still human joy! Perhaps, far from being pure pleasure, beauty in art consists of "luminous spots created to cure the eye hurt by the onrush of night?"

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Art is not eternal. This point has been elucidated repeatedly on the pages before you. Will you be greatly surprised if in conclusion the author finds nevertheless a deep-buried grain of truth in the words of Keats': "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever...?" In his trust that in such present experience "its loveliness

increases?" In his joy-full confidence that "it will never pass into nothingness?" In his expression of loyalty that this is "a flowery band to bind us to the earth?" But—also in his fear that such things "always must be with us, or we die?" We shall die—but art might die before us; this we must not let happen. "Forever" is a star word for man, as remote as the night sky. The road to it is our own, and while we are on our way, we must carry the things of beauty in our reverent hands, unknowing whither and how long. This is not a luxury but a justification of our identity in time. Because: *artistically abides man in this world.*

Temporal is human art—temporal is human being.