

# REFLECTIONS ON ART

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*A SOURCE BOOK OF  
WRITINGS BY ARTISTS,  
CRITICS, AND PHILOSOPHERS*

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## *Introduction*

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THE PURPOSE of this book is to bring together some of the many significant essays on art that have appeared within the last five or six decades, in widely scattered publications, and make them available to readers of English, especially readers who have no great library at their disposal. This is not an anthology intended to give students a survey of trends and schools in aesthetics; it does not offer representative statements of current views. It is a source book to serve independent study on the part of scholars and fairly advanced students in philosophy of art, and those excellent teachers of the arts—of painting and sculpture, music, dance, literature, or whatever else—who do their own thinking about basic principles.

Since the selections are intended for such critical use, they are given in their entirety. The decision to make no cuts entailed several considerations in the choice of essays to be included: they had to be rich enough to justify their entire length, which means that most of them contain more than one important idea. Those that make but one simple statement are very brief. A few that stay close to one idea and yet run to a good many pages carry that idea into great detail, as for instance Dräger's, Reinold's, and Sauvage's papers. They have all been chosen because they make some real contribution to art theory either in the way of a new idea or of clarification in a moot and confused realm. There has been no attempt to balance the several arts against each other. If most of the analytic thinking is found in music, well and good; then there may be more essays on music than on painting or poetry.

This does not necessarily mean that less theoretical work has been done in one art than in another; for a second principle of selection has been *availability* of the piece. Those essays that have been anthologized in generally procurable books have here been omitted. Among these is Edward Bullough's "Psychical Distance' as a Factor in Art and as an Aesthetic Principle," which was largely reprinted in both editions of Rader's *A Modern Book of Aesthetics* (Henry Holt & Co., 1935, 1952) and in *The Problems of Aesthetics: A Book of Readings* (Rinehart & Co., 1953), by Eliseo Vivas and Murray Krieger, and had, in fact, originally appeared in a journal that is easy of access, the *British Journal of Psychology*, v, 2 (1912). It has been republished *in toto* in a collection of Bullough's essays, *Aesthetics* (Stanford University Press, 1957). For a similar reason I have left out René Wellek's "The Mode of Existence in a Literary Work of Art," which may be found in R. Stallman's *Critiques and Essays in Criticism* (Ronald Press, 1949), and a very valuable article by Roger Sessions, "The Composer and his Message," in Augusto Centeno's collection entitled *The Intent of the Artist* (Princeton University Press, 1941), not to mention Mr. Centeno's own piece from which his volume takes its title. These are only a few examples. A further limitation on my choices was, of course, the unfortunate one of simple ignorance. No one can be versed in the whole recent literature of four or five arts; and furthermore, I was limited to the languages I can read with sufficient ease to have read a dozen papers for every one finally chosen.

In general, these papers deal with the nature of art, and especially the relation of art to actuality; the principles and processes of artistic creation, which involve the relation of the work of art to its materials, and of the artist to the work, to its material, its motif, and its public; the all-important topic of artistic expression and the traffic of art with human sensibility and emotion. Some are "protocol statements," others impersonal, theoretical studies. Some draw upon both experiential and scholarly resources.

Personal experience, in art or anywhere else, must of course be taken at face value; theories, on the other hand, may be critically weighed. I do not agree with everything the authors of these articles say. Thus Mehlis, for instance, seems to me to confuse art and life in his treatment of "aesthetic distance." Yet for anyone interested in that concept it may be valuable to contrast his treatment with Morgan's, and also with Bullough's, to which reference has already

been made; for obviously Mehlis opposes "distance" to "intimacy," whereas the other two writers oppose it to something like "participation" or "actualization." Just how these different conceptions are related to each other may well be a key problem in philosophy of art. Sauvage appears to use "form" in the unhappiest way possible when she speaks of one *aspect* of the work of art as its "first form" (meaning something like the scholastics' "first intension" of a word). Her evaluation of English poetic rhythms mystified me at first, for to an English ear the rhythm of "The Raven" seems to jingle rather than to roll in great sonorous waves, and this has, indeed, often been found in contradiction to the somber intent of the piece; but upon reading it as a French person would hear it, without the English syllabic stress that makes it jingle, I was amazed and amused to find it flowing with something like the grandeur of the classical French hexameter. This dependence of poetic style on what is really just national habit of speech and hearing could find no better illustration, and perhaps no other revelation, than in this judgment by a foreign critic. Reinold's complete confidence in the neurological doctrines that suit his purpose, despite their tentative and controversial standing in a fast-growing science, weakens his philosophical position, but fortunately is not as essential to his argument as he apparently believes. More serious is the bizarre character of his last section, because it is due to a confused shift of meaning, from "play" of processes *on* each other ("a play between acoustic stimuli and the entire scope of gestalt experience . . . of the perceiving individual") to "play" of partners *with* each other, and a consequent spurious personification of music that leads to the whimsical absurdity of music playing with its auditor. The conclusion that Baensch asks us to accept with regard to feelings, obviously for lack of the idea of *symbolic presentation*, strikes me as slightly mad.

Yet of course there is a fundamental agreement between these authors and me, or I would have no reason to judge their work as generally sound and important. They are, in fact, all people from whom I have drawn some of my own philosophical ideas. They all either expound or tacitly assume two basic concepts: the concept of expressiveness, as I treated it in *Feeling and Form*; and the concept of "semblance" (Schiller's "*Schein*"), which defines the work of art as a wholly created appearance, the Art Symbol. Their explicit acceptance of these basic concepts, and especially their constant use of them in handling problems of artistic meaning, structure,

aesthetic versus nonaesthetic values, distance, talent, technique, and many other subjects, seems to me the surest corroboration for the philosophy of art I have tried to build on these same fundamental ideas.

A philosophical theory is not called upon to furnish "irrefutable proofs," but concepts that give rise to insight and discovery. One can sometimes prove the consistency of concepts, and inconsistency can always be logically demonstrated; but one cannot prove the excellence of a concept, even if it be logically impeccable, except pragmatically, by operating with it successfully. Concepts give us formulations of fact, ways of putting things; they are coherent or disconnected, fertile in useful derivatives or sterile, enlightening or confusing; but not true or false. Philosophy is not empirical knowledge. Yet to construct the conceptual framework of knowledge—which is philosophical, even when it is made by scientists, artists, historians, jurists, or others who are not professional philosophers—requires some intimacy with the intellectual strains that framework will have to bear. One has to know the difficulties, paradoxes, mysteries of the subject. Therefore I have included some articles in which difficulties are raised, with or without solution. Baensch's paper, for instance, presents such a mystery: a feeling that exists "as a content of the world" while no living being is having it—exists in an insentient object or simply in a place—is certainly a peculiar finding. This was, however, the beginning of a line of thought that seems to me to have reached solution. Compare Baensch's work of 1923 with Garvin's of 1947. Even earlier, in Reid's paper of 1928, the concept of symbolic expressiveness lets the expressive work of art appear as a symbol of sentience and emotion, conveying formulated ideas of feelings instead of "containing" actual feelings without "having" them. The great virtue of Baensch's study is his candor and daring in the face of imminent absurdity. Once a problem is so clearly pointed up as a paradoxical result of accepted premises, it is ripe for solution, often by many thinkers at once. The hardest work has been done; one further idea will solve it.

Other "chestnut problems" of aesthetics become less recalcitrant, too, from the standpoint these authors seem to share. The venerable issue of life and its image can receive surer handling, without any need for evasion or concessions, on the assumption that *everything* in art is created and either serves for expressiveness or weakens the work. The several articles on "distance," especially with respect to

the most strikingly mimetic art, that of the stage, take up this matter of *objectification*. The old worry about deluding the playgoer, straining his credulity or begging him at least to "make believe," which haunted Ibsen's generation (and, at intervals, many before), is definitively dead. Bullough's essay of 1912 dealt it the fatal blow. Since then, aestheticians of the theater have developed the concept of dramatization on the same principles as all other essentially artistic processes.

Another major problem made amenable to solution, this time by consistently maintaining the distinction between actuality and semblance, i.e., what goes into the work and what is created (on the perceptual level rather than the level of import), is the old literary problem of "what the poet tells us." Müller and Burroughs (the latter in 1892) have tackled this issue; but the implications of their excellent, little-known papers have scarcely been sighted yet, let alone worked out, with results that might be serious for the current methods of studying and teaching literature.

The chief virtue of a fertile theory is that it allows philosophical inquiry (i.e., conceptual analysis and construction) to go into detail. As an instance, three essays on the relation of actual time to musical time are here presented, each carrying the analysis a little further—sometimes in a philosophical direction (e.g., Marcel), sometimes in a more strictly limited realm. Then, the same notion of time is treated very astutely as a concept relating to art in general (Sauvage), and finally as a problem of just those arts that are usually distinguished from the "temporal" and called "spatial," the plastic arts (Souriau).<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein Bayer extends the notion of *rhythm* to all the arts and finds it a central concept. Souriau, by implication, takes exception to such extensions of the concept of "rhythm," which he considers dangerous to clear thinking (though, oddly, he accepts the "phrasing" of a picture and the "élan" of a building). Which one has the better case is the sort of problem for which this book is to furnish material. The essay by Dräger is hardly to be called philosophical, but is included as an example of the close analytic work that a clarification of concepts involves even within the limited realm of psychology of musical perception. This is the sort of intimate knowledge of *what a concept has to do*

<sup>1</sup> The reader's attention should also be called to a recent article, "The Value of Time in Modern Drama," by Frederick J. Hunter, in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, xvi, 2 (Dec. 1957), pp. 194-201.

that we need before we can philosophize about music or any other art. For any technical understanding of music, "tone color" is a superficial notion, for it is too vague to determine any ways of creation; in Dräger's analysis it becomes apparent that the various effects loosely so called are not only various, but may each be achieved in several ways. They are all elements of the musical illusion, created effects, distinct from the materials (e.g., loudness, overtones, number of instruments, etc.) out of which they are made.

From the study of artistic creation and expression it is an easy step to that of perception, or artistic intuition; in fact, the relation between them is so close that Croce saw fit to identify expression and intuition. As an example of philosophical reflection based on scientific knowledge and a pure, unconfused artistic interest, dealing with the problem of reception rather than composition, I include Reinold's article on musical hearing. A more general discussion of artistic perception is Steinberg's essay.

Most of these writings bear on more than one problem in the arts. That is why they have not been grouped under general headings. It is too easy for an editor to stress one issue, one virtue, or one point in an article, and for the reader subsequently to miss others that he would have found of particular interest, if his reading had not been narrowed in advance by someone else's analysis. Some of the papers are intimate records of the creative experience and also theoretical statements about art; Flannagan's, for instance, broaches the problem of an artist's control of the material and the material's control over his idea, the interaction of its potentialities and his own; Castelnuovo, in his firsthand report of handling texts for songs, states his demands upon a work of one art that is to be ingested by a work of another art, and implicitly offers us his views on the relations of poetry and music in song. Rohden's piece is essentially about the difference between actuality and art, but it also gives us a good deal of insight into the creative process that takes place on stage. Mehlis, Brelet, Sauvage, Malraux, all treat of the influence of art on life itself, the formulation of actual feeling by its image in art. Yet that is not their central theme.

Because of this many-sidedness of the material here offered, and the many kinds of study I hope it may serve, it were best, perhaps, not to discuss it any further. But a word has yet to be said about the translation of articles from French and German. An editor is

often hard put to it to choose between a literal translation and a faithful following of some long German sentence, with strings of modifiers that unroll into as many clauses in English and phrases within phrases rendering the compact, composite German statement. Unfortunately, German scholars today seem to make something of a game out of the involution and concentric packing of ideas, like Chinese boxes, into complex sentences, that the German language permits (a sample from one of our essays may show any reader with a fair reading knowledge of German what the translators had to cope with: "Bestehen vom Bauplan her keine wesentlichen Unklarheiten über die Receptionsorgane und deren Zuleitungen zum Gehirn, die zur Weitergabe der von Uexküll Merkszeichen genannten Sinnesreize angelegt sind, so sind vom Anatomischen, zumal aus der von H. Braus eingeführten „biologischen“ Sicht her die auf die noch zu erörternde Leistung der Ordnungszeichen hin im Bauplan vorgebildeten Verbindungen innerhalb des Gehirns schwieriger zu ergründen, aus denen sich das Lokalisationsproblem entwickelt hat"). The French texts, on the other hand, have a wealth of idiom that is capable of several renderings, each with a different sense, and one has to decide in each context with what degree of force the words should be rendered in our less versatile tongue. Add to this the fact that thinkers presenting new ideas often coin new words to distinguish them, which should properly be translated into corresponding English neologisms—something that a translator, more conversant with the languages than with the material, will seldom dare to do—and you have the editor's problem before you. We have tried to render faithfully every subordinate idea, every small modification, in each sentence, without copying a foreign phraseology. But any reader who compares the more difficult texts (notably Bayer, Sauvage, Reinold, and Dräger) with their originals might favor other decisions. In any case, I have to take full responsibility for the translations,<sup>2</sup> though I did not make them.

The illustrations presented another problem. Some of the articles presuppose a fairly wide knowledge of individual works, and of course the number of pictures in a book of this sort is rather stringently limited. So I have chosen one sculptural example to show what Flannagan is talking about; Poussin's *Shepherds in Arcadia*, be-

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Souriau's and Malraux's articles, which were taken from their sources already in translation.



cause it is discussed in more than one essay; Rubens' *Descent from the Cross*, as a really notable example of a key concept that cannot be understood without visible demonstration—the distinction between the representation of time by symbols and the expression of time in forms and virtual motions—noted by Souriau and again by Sauvage. The two drawings placed side by side are intended to illustrate the "personal signature" of the artist's pencil, the individual line that marks a person's work no matter what he depicts, which substantiates Bayer's theory of the "rhythmic constants" in art. The two architectural photographs are a meager visual aid to the last essay in the book, which makes direct reference to so many examples of modern architecture that it really requires a dozen illustrations. Practical problems of securing material have entered somewhat into the choice where only two buildings could be depicted; but the main reasons for showing the Johnson Building were the cultural importance of this American architecture, the synthesis of continuity and stability, horizontal and vertical freedom, space and mass, that it aptly illustrates, and the sheer beauty it imprints on an industrial world. The other picture, Notre Dame de Ronchamp, was of course chosen in view of the author's emphasis on this achievement. Finally, a single example of so-called "modern painting" has to help the unaccustomed reader to judge Steinberg's contention that our most serious and original artists are presenting a new vision of the good old "real world." I hope Gregoropoulos will make Steinberg's point lucid to the thinker with eyes, and Steinberg will illuminate Gregoropoulos' venture for the beholder with notions.

Philosophy always stems from more particular cultural developments, for it is, after all, a process of "philosophizing," and one has to philosophize *about* something. The task demands the tools and invites certain kinds of treatment. Mediaeval philosophy grew out of religious controversies. So-called "modern" philosophy arose from a new ideal of "knowledge" that raised the question of what really could be called "modern" philosophy, and why. The result was that for several generations philosophy became practically synonymous with theory of knowledge. The spectacular rise of natural science channeled it still further into long but narrow reaches, until its whole task seemed to be the critique of scientific concepts. Positivism, physicalism, and in the study of animate nature behaviorism, are the best-known spoils of that excursion. The

most profound critique of science, of course, is still going on and rarely produces "isms," but a wealth of philosophical ideas, too difficult for popular statement, that are often ingested in scientific thinking even before they appear in any explicitly philosophical work. The philosophy of science is still in the making. But even in its present rapid career one can see that it will not be only a philosophy of physics; like any organically growing thing, it is interacting with its intellectual environment, to the astonishing transformation of both.

One of the new sources of philosophical thinking is the world-old phenomenon of art. It is a new source because it is just being tapped by modern philosophers.<sup>3</sup> But, like most long-sealed springs, it is strong. Basic philosophical problems that take rise from our reflections on art develop fast and throw new light especially on the somewhat stalemated concepts of psychology and the still wavering, vague, or else prematurely narrow concepts of anthropology. The surest sign of a new life in philosophical thinking may be found in the more difficult and theoretical essays here collected: they refer one to another without polemical intent and seem to belong to the same general advance without any common creed or school. They take issue with each other over special allegations or implications, without simply "refuting" one another, as theorists at the end of an intellectual era generally do. The spirit of philosophical invention, and of what the Germans call "Gedankenexperiment," is still upon them. This often makes the most detailed and analytic studies the best reading.

But philosophical ideas are not a monopoly of professional philosophers; some of these essays are quite nontechnical statements by people who write, and think, in the half-metaphorical language of artists and lay aestheticians. It is a deceptive language, the despair of more logically trained thinkers, and something like an electrified barbed wire to a proper positivist; but if one wants to gather ideas on art from artists, one has to learn this strangely irresponsible studio-language. So I have not balked at the somewhat "purple" style of Gisèle Brelet or the mysticism of Flannagan; as for the undocumented speculations of Malraux and Kraussold, these

<sup>3</sup> In the history of philosophy, "modern" means "since the mediaeval period," i.e., including much of the Renaissance, which began at different times in different places and even circles. "Modern" is a somewhat indefinite but useful term.

are the forward thrusts of venturesome explorers. So I offer this heterogeneous collection, impartially, to lovers and custodians and philosophers of the arts, and recommend it to their critical mercies.

As the book finally goes to press, I want to express my thanks to several people who have been helpful to me: first of all Professor René Wellek, for his kind assistance to one hard-pressed translator in coping with the difficulties of the German "impossible" style; then to all the copyright-holders who have let me include articles or pictures in their possession, and especially those who, in generosity, have freely given the desired materials—Dr. François Bucher, Madame Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Mr. John Gregoropoulos, Mr. and Mrs. Milton Lowenthal, Mr. André Malraux, Mrs. Günther Müller, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Max Hesses Publishing Co., the Museum of Modern Art, *Music and Letters*, *Partisan Review*, *Perspecta: The Yale Architectural Journal*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, and *Revue d'Esthétique*.

The coöperation of the publishers may usually be taken for granted and one's sense of gratitude remain tacit, but in this case I do feel that I owe special thanks to The Johns Hopkins University Press for relieving me of the extensive business correspondence and the great financial outlay involved in making an anthology that usually fall to the lot of its editor, but were in this case most kindly assumed by the publishers. Without this aid, I do not think my source book would have come into existence.

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S. K. L.