

INTRODUCTION

No people known to us, however hard their lives may be, spend all their time, all their energies in the acquisition of food and shelter, nor do those who live under more favorable conditions and who are free to devote to other pursuits the time not needed for securing their sustenance occupy themselves with purely industrial work or idle away the days in indolence. Even the poorest tribes have produced work that gives to them esthetic pleasure, and those whom a bountiful nature or a greater wealth of inventions has granted freedom from care, devote much of their energy to the creation of works of beauty.

In one way or another esthetic pleasure is felt by all members of mankind. No matter how diverse the ideals of beauty may be, the general character of the enjoyment of beauty is of the same order everywhere; the crude song of the Siberians, the dance of the African Negroes, the pantomime of the Californian Indians, the stone work of the New Zealanders, the carvings of the Melanesians, the sculpture of the Alaskans appeal to them in a manner not different from that felt by us when we hear a song, when we see an artistic dance, or when we admire ornamental work, painting or sculpture. The very existence of song, dance, painting and sculpture among all the tribes known to us is proof of the craving to produce things that are felt as satisfying through their form, and of the capability of man to enjoy them.

All human activities may assume forms that give them esthetic values. The mere cry, or the word does not necessarily possess the elements of beauty. If it does so it is merely a matter of accident. Violent, unrestrained movements induced by excitement; the exertions of the chase and the movements required by daily occupations are partly reflexes of passion, partly practically determined. They have no immediate esthetic appeal. The same is

true of all products of industrial activity. The daubing of paint, the whittling of wood or bone, the flaking of stone do not necessarily lead to results that compel our admiration on account of their beauty.

Nevertheless, all of them may assume esthetic values. Rhythmical movements of the body or of objects, forms that appeal to the eye, sequences of tones and forms of speech which please the ear, produce artistic effects. Muscular, visual and auditory sensations are the materials that give us esthetic pleasure and that are used in art.

We may also speak of impressions that appeal to the senses of smell, taste and touch. A composition of scents, a gastronomical repast may be called works of art provided they excite pleasurable sensations.

What then gives to the sensation an esthetic value? When the technical treatment has attained a certain standard of excellence, when the control of the processes involved is such that certain typical forms are produced, we call the process an art, and however simple the forms may be, they may be judged from the point of view of formal perfection; industrial pursuits such as cutting, carving, moulding, weaving; as well as singing, dancing and cooking are capable of attaining technical excellence and fixed forms. The judgment of perfection of technical form is essentially an esthetic judgment. It is hardly possible to state objectively just where the line between artistic and pre-artistic forms should be drawn, because we cannot determine just where the esthetic attitude sets in. It seems certain, however, that wherever a definite type of movement, a definite sequence of tones or a fixed form has developed it must become a standard by which its perfection, that is, its beauty, is measured.

Such types exist among mankind the world over, and we must assume that if an unstandardized form should prove to possess an esthetic appeal for a community it would readily be adopted. Fixity of form seems to be most intimately connected with our ideas of beauty.

Since a perfect standard of form can be attained only in a highly developed and perfectly controlled technique there must be an intimate relation between technique and a feeling for beauty.

It might be said that achievement is irrelevant as long as the ideal of beauty for which the would-be artist strives is in existence, although on account of imperfect technique he may be unable to attain it. Alois Riegl expresses this idea by saying that the will to produce an esthetic result is the essence of artistic work. The truth of this assertion may be admitted and undoubtedly many individuals strive for expression of an esthetic impulse without being able to realize it. What they are striving for presupposes the existence of an ideal form which the unskilled muscles are unable to express adequately. The intuitive feeling for form must be present. So far as our knowledge of the works of art of primitive people extends the feeling for form is inextricably bound up with technical experience. Nature does not seem to present formal ideals,—that is fixed types that are imitated,—except when a natural object is used in daily life; when it is handled, perhaps modified, by technical processes. It would seem that only in this way form impresses itself upon the human mind. The very fact that the manufactures of man in each and every part of the world have pronounced style proves that a feeling for form develops with technical activities. There is nothing to show that the mere contemplation of nature or of natural objects develops a sense of fixed form. Neither have we any proof that a definite stylistic form develops as a product purely of the power of the imagination of the workman, unguided by his technical experience which brings the form into his consciousness. It is conceivable that elementary esthetic forms like symmetry and rhythm, are not entirely dependent upon technical activities; but these are common to all art styles; they are not specifically characteristic of any particular region. Without stability of form of objects, manufactured or in common use, there is no style; and stability of form depends upon the development of a high technique, or in a few cases on the constant use of the same kind of natural products.

When stable forms have been attained, imaginative development of form in an imperfect technique may set in and in this case the will to produce an esthetic result may outrun the ability of the would-be artist. The same consideration holds good in regard to the esthetic value of muscular movements used in song and dance.

The manufactures of man the world over prove that the ideal forms are based essentially on standards developed by expert technicians. They may also be imaginative developments of older standardized forms. Without a formal basis the will to create something that appeals to the sense of beauty can hardly exist.

Many works of art affect us in another way. The emotions may be stimulated not by the form alone, but also by close associations that exist between the form and ideas held by the people. In other words, when the forms convey a meaning, because they recall past experiences or because they act as symbols, a new element is added to the enjoyment. The form and its meaning combine to elevate the mind above the indifferent emotional state of every-day life. Beautiful sculpture or painting, a musical composition, dramatic art, a pantomime, may so affect us. This is no less true of primitive art than of our own.

Sometimes esthetic pleasure is released by natural forms. The song of a bird may be beautiful; we may experience pleasure in viewing the form of a landscape or in viewing the movements of an animal; we may enjoy a natural taste or smell, or a pleasant feeling; grandeur of nature may give us an emotional thrill and the actions of animals may have a dramatic effect; all of these have esthetic values but they are not art. On the other hand, a melody, a carving, a painting, a dance, a pantomime are esthetic productions, because they have been created by our own activities.

Form, and creation by our own activities are essential features of art. The pleasure or elevation of the mind must be brought about by a particular form of sense impression, but this sense impression must be made by some kind of human activity or by some product of human activity.

It is essential to bear in mind the twofold source of artistic effect, the one based on form alone, the other on ideas associated with form. Otherwise the theory of art will be one-sided. Since the art of man, the world over, among primitive tribes as well as among civilized nations, contains both elements, the purely formal and the significant, it is not admissible to base all discussions of the manifestations of the art impulse upon the assumption that the expression of emotional states by significant forms must be the beginning of art, or that, like language, art is a form of expression. In modern times this opinion is based in part on the often observed fact that in primitive art even simple geometrical forms may possess a meaning that adds to their emotional value, and that dance, music and poetry almost always have definite meaning. However, significance of artistic form is neither universal nor can it be shown that it is necessarily older than the form.

I do not intend to enter into a discussion of the philosophical theories of esthetics, but will confine myself to a few remarks on the views of a number of recent authors who have treated art on the basis of ethnological material, and only in so far as the question is concerned whether primitive art is expressive of definite ideas.

Our views agree fundamentally with those of Fechner¹ who recognizes the "direct" appeal of the work of art on the one side and the associated elements that give a specific tone to the esthetic effects on the other.

Wundt² restricts the discussion of art to those forms in which the artistic work expresses some thought or emotion. He says, "For the psychological study art stands in a position intermediate between language and myth. . . . Thus the creative artistic work appears to us as a peculiar development of the expressive movements of the body. Gesture and language pass in a fleeting moment. In art they are sometimes given a higher significance; sometimes the

¹ G. T. Fechner, *Vorschule der Aesthetik*.

² Wilhelm Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, Vol. 3, *Die Kunst*; third edition, Leipzig, 1919, p. 5.

fleeting movement is given a permanent form . . . All these relations are manifested principally in the relatively early, although not in the very earliest stages of artistic work in which the momentary needs of expression of thought dominate art as well as language."

Max Verworn¹ says: "Art is the faculty to express conscious processes by means created by the artist himself in such a manner that they may be perceived by our sense organs. In this general sense language, song, music and dance are art, just as well as painting, sculpture and ornamentation. The graphic and plastic arts in the narrow sense of the term result from the ability of making conscious processes visible in permanent materials."

Richard Thurnwald² accepts the view-point of Wundt when he says, "Art, however inadequate its means may be, is a means of expression that belongs to mankind. The means employed are distinct from those used in gesture, language and writing. Even when the artist is intent only upon the repetition of what he has in mind he does so with at least the subconscious purpose of communicating his ideas, of influencing others."

The same oneness may be recognized in Yrjö Hirn's³ opinion, who says: "In order to understand the art impulse as a tendency to esthetic production we must bring it into connection with some function from the nature of which the specifically artistic qualities may be derived. Such a function is to be found, we believe, in the activities of emotional expression."

It will be seen that all these authors confine their definition of art to those forms which are expressions of emotional states or of ideas, while they do not include in art the pleasure conveyed by purely formal elements that are not primarily expressive.

Ernst Grosse⁴ expresses similar views in somewhat different form.

¹ Die Anfänge der Kunst, Jena, 1920, p. 8. "Kunst im allgemeinsten Sinne ist, wie das Wort schon sagt, ein 'Können'."

² Richard Thurnwald, Handbuch der vergleichenden Psychologie, herausgegeben von Gustav Kafka, Vol. I, pag. 211.

³ Yrjö Hirn, The Origins of Art, London, 1900, p. 29.

⁴ Ernst Grosse, Die Anfänge der Kunst, 1894, p. 292.

He stresses the practical purpose of artistic forms which appears to him as primary. However, he assumes that these forms, while devoted first of all to practical purposes, are intended at the same time to serve an esthetic need that is felt by the people. Thus, he says, that primitive ornament is by origin and by its fundamental nature not intended as decorative but as a practically significant mark or symbol, that is to say as expressive. If I understand him correctly this practical significance implies some kind of meaning inherent in the form.

Emil Stephan¹ concludes from his detailed discussion of Melanesian art that technical motives offer no sufficient explanation for the origin of artistic forms (pp. 52. et seq.). He considers all ornament as representative and sees the origin of art in that unconscious mental process by which the form appears as distinct from the content of the visual impression, and in the desire to give permanence to the form (p. 51). For this reason he considers the artistic forms also as equivalents of the way in which the form appears to the primitive artist.

Alfred C. Haddon² and W. H. Holmes³ seek the origin of all decorative art in realism. They discuss the transfer of technical forms to ornament but they see in these also results of the endeavor to reproduce realistic form, namely; technical details. Henry Balfour⁴ agrees, on the whole, with this position but he stresses also the development of decorative motives from the actual use of technical processes.

Gottfried Semper⁵ emphasizes the importance of the form as determined by the manner of use. He also stresses the influence of designs developed in weaving and of their transfer upon other forms of technique, particularly upon architectural forms.

¹ Emil Stephan, Südseekunst, Berlin, 1907.

² Alfred C. Haddon, Evolution in Art, London 1895.

³ W. H. Holmes, Origin and Development of Form in Ceramic Art, Annual Report Bureau of Ethnology, Vol. 4, 1886, pp. 443 et seq.

⁴ Henry Balfour, The Evolution of Decorative Art, London 1893.

⁵ Gottfried Semper, Der Stil in den Technischen und Tektonischen Künsten, 1860.

Alois Riegl¹ is also inclined to stress the representative character of the most ancient art forms, basing his argument essentially upon the realistic paleolithic carvings and paintings. He sees the most important step forward in the attempt to show the animals in outline, on a two-dimensional surface which necessitates the substitution of an ideal line for the three-dimensional form that is given to us by every day experience. He assumes that geometric ornament developed from the treatment of the line, obtained by the process just mentioned, according to formal principles.

Setting aside the assumed sequence of these two aspects, his viewpoint is distinguished from that of the authors referred to before, by the recognition of the principle of form as against that of content.

The principle of form is still more energetically defended by van Scheltema, who tries to prove definite developmental processes through which the formal treatment of North European art has passed, first in the Neolithic period, then in the bronze age and finally in the iron age.²

Alfred Vierkandt³ also emphasizes the fundamental importance of the formal element in the esthetic effect of all manifestations of art.

¹ Alois Riegl, *Stilfragen*, 2nd edition, Berlin, 1923, pp. 2 et seq.

² F. Adama van Scheltema, *Die altnordische Kunst*, Berlin, 1923. For a comprehensive review of works on primitive art up to 1914, see Martin Heydrich, *Afrikanische Ornamentik*, Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, Supplement to Volume XXII, Leyden, 1914; also the bibliography in Eckert von Sydow, *Die Kunst der Naturvölker und der Vorzeit*, Berlin, 1923; and Herbert Kühn, *Die Kunst der Primitiven*, München, 1923. An excellent review of the subject has been given by Elizabeth Wilson, *Das Ornament* (Dissertation, University of Leipzig).

³ *Prinzipienfragen der ethnologischen Kunstforschung*, *Zeitschrift für Aesthetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, Vol. XIX, Berlin, 1925, pp. 338 et seq. See also *Jahrbuch für historische Volkskunde*, Vol. II; *Vom Wesen der Volkskunst*, Berlin 1926; Rafael Karsten, *Civilization of South American Indians*, New York, 1926.