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Art and Values

Sztuka i wartości

Искусство и достоинства

VALUES

Today the term "value" is used in hundreds of different ways and in just as many different contexts. Many of its uses, especially those of some philosophers, seem mysterious. Before talking about art and values, therefore, I feel compelled at least to make clear what I mean by the term "value". And to do this I will have to start off by talking a little bit about ethics and economics.

Originally "value" was a term used in political economy as were its cognates "worth" in English and "Wert" in German. Its meaning in this context was perfectly clear. But in the late 18th and throughout the 19th centuries its application was spread to the fields of ethics and aesthetics. As we might expect, the transference of this once strictly economic concept to the fields of art and morality took place in bourgeois society in which the tendency, as Marx pointed out as early as his Paris Manuscripts, was to subject every aspect of human endeavor and existence to a common cash denominator.¹ Of course the application of the economic category of value to the products of culture, to state, and to moral life was carried out as a piece of typical, pompous, mystification and obscurantism which is the trademark of bourgeois critics and philosophers. Nevertheless, if we take the time to look carefully at the obvious purport of the extension of economic value, then we can better understand our own uses and perhaps even indicate a solution to some presumably difficult philosophical problems.

There are two points that I shall make here in preparation to a consideration of aesthetic values. Both have to do with ethics. First, the ethical problems of the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive sentences can be reduced to a description of the utility of objects we call "good" and their "value" considered as something separate. Let

¹ *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, International Publishers, New York 1964.

us acknowledge that neither value nor utility can be defined in terms of one another. Descriptive statements can be used to describe a thing's utility; whereas such statements cannot be used to describe a thing's value. This has made many philosophers curious about why it is that our language requires that we speak of a thing's value apart and separate from its usefulness to satisfy human desires and needs. Here we must recognize that it is not ethics alone in which we find two languages that refer to two kinds of value. We talk the same way about commodities in economics. On the one hand we say that commodities have a use value or utility. On the other hand, we say that they have an exchange value determined by the conditions of the market. In economics in ethics in the sense that utility or usefulness can be described in both disciplines, whereas, exchange value, which cannot be perceived in the usefulness of a thing, i.e., it seems to refer to a non-natural property, is remindful of those normative ethical statements which appear to have no empirical reference. But is it really the case in economics that our statements about exchange value refer to something non-natural? Not at all. Such statements refer to conditions external to the thing and its usefulness, but these conditions are just as real and objective as the thing itself. They are the conditions of the market system of commodity exchange.

Similarly, I suggest that we examine those social factors external to moral discourse which have produced a separation between prescriptive value and utility. In economic theory, labor value (the amount of energy expended in the production of a thing) is not equivalent to exchange value. In capitalist society, the discrepancy between the wages paid to workers and the exchange value of the thing produced is appropriated by the owner of the means of production. Correspondingly, the utility of the thing produced and its value are not equivalent. The difference here is between societies' needs on the one hand, and the profit incentive to produce the thing in question. This is why, for example, in capitalist society there is a continuing need for schools, hospitals, public transport, clinics, etc., which is never met. To meet these needs would entail unprofitable production.

Analogous to the double criterion of value in economics, we find in ethics a theoretical or linguistic distinction between facts and values. Philosophers usually assume this distinction to be a consequence of David Hume's unreasonable requirement that arguments be either deductive or defective — a demand that we do not make of empirical science itself. But most commonly we say that this distinction is made to differentiate between what people in fact have, i.e., that which exists, and what people want or desire. Certainly there is not enough of a difference between what people have and what they want in primitive, pre-class, collective societies which do not produce a surplus (what Hume called societies of necessity). Such a distinction can only arise in societies producing a surplus, class societies, societies in which one class appropriates surplus value to the disadvantage of another class or classes. In societies with a visibility of wealth juxtaposed to mass impoverishment, such language is natural and, indeed, descriptive of a state of affairs.

It was not always "natural" for philosophers to talk this way. It was not obvious to Aristotle, for example, that the usefulness of a thing was different from its value, i.e., its desirability, its excellence. This linguistic distinction was hit upon only after the development of capitalist societies in which the visible and perceived discrepancy between wealth

and impoverishment was far greater than in any other human epoch. Accordingly we expect such a distinction to appear and be given importance in the early stages of capitalist development, as indeed it did.

Second, the American philosopher Ralph Barton Perry, was quite correct in 1926 when he identified value with interest. His treatment of this equation was, however, characteristically bourgeois in that he described interest in terms of an abstract, individual psychology. As we are aware, Marx had much earlier given a more cogent account of interests by subsuming the particular under the general (which is the method of science), enabling us to better grasp individual interests and actions in terms of class interest. As I have said elsewhere,² this does not mean that individuals always recognize what is in their interest. When they do not recognize their interests it is simply because they do not know which other "...individuals, groups, or classes have goals whose realization clashes with or limits the realization of their own goals."³

An individual's interests or values are predominantly determined by social institutions and relations; family upbringing, school, church, employment, etc. The effects of these institutions along with peer group attitudes are not identical for each individual. And the differences from one person to the next are largely determined by one's specific position in the relations of production. The processes of the inculcation and acquisition of values or interests is complex and at outset is probably linked to how a child acquires language and develops language as part of its total behavior. Parenthetically, the critique and refutation of the idea that one can have a "personal ethic" should begin here with the critique of the idea of a private language, not only in the recognition that acquisition and use of language presupposes a socializing process.

But language acquisition is only the beginning of a lifelong process of indoctrination in which class interests-values are acquired. This process is largely taken over by the official or semi-official agencies of the state. And in capitalist society, the process of official indoctrination aims at the establishment of specific values-interests which include but are not limited to the sanctity of private property, and ideals involving individual autonomy, competitiveness, and aggressiveness. The "liberated" American woman has learned to be just as ruthless, aggressive, and calculating as the often caricatured and dominant male entrepreneur. Thus, the relations of production are expressed in the moral sphere.

Despite the total institutional effort which coordinates all educational, religious, informational, and socializing institutions in legitimizing the interests-values of the bourgeoisie in capitalism, the class antagonisms remain so strong that what may appear as self-evidently moral to members of one class, may seem appallingly immoral, or morally irrelevant, to another. Correspondingly, and this brings us to the problem of how class values-interests are expressed in the arts, "[...] the aesthetic criteria, concepts and principles used in the evaluation and legitimation of art are inaccessible to the masses of people. High art becomes a cloisterized possession of an elite minority who derive their

² *Ethics, Ideology and Socialist Construction* [in:] *The Philosopher In The Community: Essays in Memory of Bertram Morris*, Colorado University, forthcoming, 1984.

³ A. Heller: *Towards a Marxist Theory of Value* reprinted in "Kinesis", Vol. 5, No. 1, Fa 11, 1972, p. 16.

privileged status from economic advantage. In a word, aesthetic and cultural competence are a consequence of class. The acquisition of competence is determined again by one's position in the relations of production."⁴

In such a society, the principles, concepts and experiences that relate artistic culture to social life are closed off from the majority. But even if they were not, they would have little or no significance for the average worker. This condition discloses the most fundamental cultural contradiction of capitalism: its culture is not the possession of its people, but is hoarded and consumed by a minority.

REALISM AS AN ARTISTIC VALUE

This brings me to the question of realism. As you might have anticipated, from what I have said above, I take the theory of aesthetic realism as giving the only adequate account of value acquisition and value propagation in culture and the arts. And of the several realist theories of art only that associated with Marxism is capable of providing a scientific understanding of these processes. My reasons for this conclusion are both historical and epistemological. First I will outline the historical considerations.

The development of artistic representation in history shows many examples of the distortion of the natural image. This distortion is not the result of the technical incompetence of the artist, or writer. Here I am supposing that content determines form and that new content seeks and creates new forms. Or to put it another way, the artist deliberately transforms or distorts the natural image in accordance with the contents of his own consciousness. Artistic consciousness is the product of its social environment. This means that there come into being from time to time artistic movements, even whole epochs, in which are created, works of art that are descriptively (imagistically or realistically) incomplete. But at the same time these works are wholly complete and truly representative in their own realm, of their context. They are only deficient with regard to a larger principle of reality. This principle of reality asserts that only in the greatest works of art the consciousness of the artist and his representation nearly adequate to each other. In these instances consciousness is true in and for itself, because it is not limited consciousness or false consciousness. It expresses a true content, a correct apprehension of its material, social, and historical context. The art critic, aesthete, or literary critic who lacks adequate understanding of the social-historical determinants of artistic consciousness and ideology cannot identify the distortions of limited or incomplete works of art because he will not employ a larger standard of reality. This does not mean that he is a poor critic. It does mean that his criticism, like the works he studies, is incomplete; because even though he may fully understand and evaluate it in the context of its greater social-historical context. He is doomed to a kind of specialization: the expert of baroque, the specialist in 18th century English poetry, the master of American naturalism, etc. Thus it is easy, almost inevitable, that he becomes preoccupied with formal details while suppressing the larger historical significance of art and literature.

All art represents a total life form; is a concrete representation of social life itself. True criticism and interpretation have to come to grips with this relationship between art

⁴ W. Truitt: *Art for The People* [in:] *The Arts in a Democratic Society*, D. Mann (ed.), Bowling Green University Press, 1977, p. 62-63.

and social life. We must reconcile the inner (artistic) with the outer (social-historical), the momentary with the ongoing, the intrinsic with the extrinsic. We must also reconcile the opposition between the pure formalistic description of art and sociological and historical interpretation and in so doing unite them in a single understanding. This is what good Marxist criticism and interpretation attempt. And here we must distinguish between good Marxist criticism and the typical bourgeois caricature of Marxist criticism. That caricature turns out to be a crude, vulgar, one-sided sociology and therefore undialectical – its only dimension of concern being the social determinants of artistic practice. Good Marxist criticism, on the other hand, is dialectical in the sense described here; for it unites in a single comprehension the inner artistic elements with momentary external factors and with the greater continuum of art and social history from which the work emerges. Now if we are willing to recognize the near perfection of the greatest artistic periods of our history, are we then to conclude lies in the future – in a period of minimum social and contextual distortion, in a classless society, a society in which such an adequation can be sought singlemindedly? I think we must, and shall say more about this later. But let me now turn to what I believe to be the epistemological grounds on which realism is best defended.⁵

All realist theories have one thing in common and that is that they attempt to show that art reflects or imitates the social world or nature. Crude realisms suggest that art mirrors the world. More sophisticated versions suggest that artists construct a symbolic representation of their environment. Realistic theories also, almost always, include a test or criterion for establishing the accuracy of the reflection or imitation. This provides a principle for determining the quality or worth of the work.

Even though the definition of reflection or imitation, as well as the test for accuracy, on such theories may be relatively loose (it may not require empirical, descriptive correspondence between the work and the subject) there are obviously many difficulties in such a view. It is mainly for this reason, I believe, that a number of alternatives to realist theories have developed over time. There would be no sense in cataloging all of these alternative theories here because I do not intend to discuss them. Rather I will discuss them together as "alternatives" and try to state how realist theories must confront and deal with these theories if realism is to be a viable theory itself.

An independent or detached realist theory of art is vulnerable at best and probably unintelligible. An independent realist theory would be one that presents itself as an exhaustive and complete account of the meaning contained in all works of art. It would be a theory that is detached from a more general theory of culture and history or detached from a systematic philosophical outlook. As far as I am aware, no one ever held such a theory, although it has been used as a "straw" theory by opponents of realism. There are, however, historical examples of the practice of realism in the extreme form of naturalistic copying, i.e., attempts to execute in exact detail a copy of the subject. The portraiture of the middle Roman Empire is an example. An independent realist theory could explain such historical examples, but very little else.

Attempts to contradict or otherwise refute realist theories usually employ an endless number of counter examples of art works which are clearly "nonrealistic." And such

⁵ Much of what follows in this part of my paper on realism can be found in my article *Realism* in the "Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism", Winter, 1978.

counter examples go back to the earliest times. The late paleolithic and neolithic symbolism, which deviated from an earlier naturalistic tradition, cannot be taken as the result of ineptitude on the part of the artists. At their best, however, counter examples might show that realism is a false theory, and not even that on the more flexible approaches to theory building which are characteristic of Hilary Putnam's recent work. The main point is that realist theory of art cannot stand on its own. It cannot be satisfied with generalizing on the limited sphere of artistic meaning. Putnam has recommended an approach to philosophy (which I will use here for aesthetics and theory of art) which attempts to show that various methods that seem to be opposed are in fact not.

A problem of aesthetics is that conceptual analyses of art and psychological theories of art have not come to reflect a genetic or evolutionary account of cultural history and change. Therefore, few, if any of these analyses reflect changes in artistic practice. For example, we may choose to analyze Giotto's "Massacre of the Innocents" in terms of the immediate constituents of the work: the biblical story depicted, spatial and expressive components, the vertical and horizontal relations of form, symbolism, etc. And in each case we may still want to know which of these analyses is most adequate; or, if they are all equally interesting, what ties them together, or which account is most important in understanding the work. We must ask "what is the best general theory of art (as a human activity or social enterprise) to introduce to get answers to the questions above."⁶

A full account of the Giotto mentioned which invokes a general theory of art without eradicating significant "sub-theories" is given by Hanna Deinhard in *Meaning and Expression* (Bedeutung und Ausdruck): "[...] the pictorial structure fully corresponds to that 'spirit', or that mentality which authors of diverse persuasions have called variously 'market oriented rationality' (Max Weber), 'substantial' rationality (Karl Mannheim), or 'merchants mentality' (A. von Martin). No matter how far apart these authors may be in terms of methods, they all are in agreement in one respect, namely, in seeing this mentality, 'new' when compared to that of the Middle Ages, as a consequence of the change in social and economic structure whose origins are traceable to the twelfth century, but whose most distinctive and earliest manifestation occurred in Florence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – the rise of capitalism and the development of an economically and politically independent middle class."⁷

What I am suggesting is that there are interesting and informative accounts (sub-theories) of art ranging from strict formalism to psychoanalysis, but that these had best be registered and tested against more general scientific theories of human society and culture. When this is done, the imminent meaning or content of the work of art can be related to aesthetic vocabularies which are consistent with, translatable into, and explicable by means of a scientific, realistic, and empirical theory of culture and society.⁸

⁶ Compare H. Putnam, *Is Semantics Possible?* originally in H. Kiefer, M. Munitz (eds.), *Language, Belief and Metaphysics*, Vol. 1, *Contemporary Philosophic Thought: International Philosophy Year Conference at Brockport*, State University of New York Press, 1970. See also Putnam: *Mind, Language and Reality*, "Philosophical Papers", Vol. 2, Cambridge 1975, p. 144.

⁷ H. Deinhard: *Meaning and Expression*, Beacon Press, Boston 1970, p. 34. (USA)

⁸ Compare Putnam: *op. cit.*, p. 146.

Below I will suggest that realist theory of art and historical and dialectical materialism provide a point of convergence for all such sub-theories. When sub-theoretical analyses are shown to be surd or irreducible beyond the idiolect in which they are elaborated, they are either false or require radical translation into a different vocabulary. This approach might also be applied to the social sciences in general where isolated and detached analyses of institutions and behaviors abound and lead to confusion and unfounded ideological dogmatism. What we seek after all is a theory that has the capacity to explain and account for all artistic deviations from realist depiction. And it must employ consistently realistic principles in giving such an account. In addition it must have the theoretical capacity to explain the appearance of non-realist theories.

The only way the realist theory can hope to accomplish a task of such enormity and complexity is if it is more than a theory of art. It must be part of a theory of art history which in turn forms a part of a general theory of history. No pre-Marxist theory of art was able to undertake this task because none were integrated with more general theories of art history and history proper. (Hegel's lectures are not integrated with his general system and his theory of artistic meaning is not "realist" in any case). Marxist theory of art, i.e., historical materialism, undertakes systematic explication of the values of society as they are expressed in art and theories of art. Its claims are:

1. All works of art reflect the stage of development of the forces of production and the social relations of production or institutions and values created and sustained by productive forces and relations.

2. All non-realist theories of art subjectivize and mystify the process of art production and the value-interest content of art.

The second claim is stated polemically but its sense, in my opinion, is not too strong. In any case, an application of the approach recommended here would be helpful in assessing these and other claims set out in "Marxist theories of art".

The most significant criticism of historical materialism, as the basis for a realist theory of art, is that its explanations of historical and theoretical deviations from realism are not falsifiable. Of course, this is a difficulty only when we have established what constitutes falsification. But let us assume, for the sake of simplicity, that we have agreed on a principle of falsifiability (the kind of test with which an interpretation would be falsified). Now we must ask, why has the criticism been advanced in the first place? Historical materialism is an empirical theory that admits to refutation, based on evidence, of any interpretation of a historic event or artifact. It seems probable that the criticism was initially aimed at the slight-of hand maneuvers of some Marxist interpreters of art. I have in mind specifically Plekhanov's facile use of the principle of negation.⁹ Whenever he encountered an obviously non-realistic work, instead of negation which asserted that such a work reflected the desire on the part of the artist to violate and negate the realist tradition. Indeed, such a claim can neither be proven true nor false. But there is no doubt that the effect of the *art pour l'art* movement led to artistic developments accurately described by the "principle of negation". This is the tendency in what has been termed "non-objective art" and "anti-art", i.e., the repudiation of the traditional categories of form and content.¹⁰

⁹ G. V. Plekhanov: *Art and Social Life*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1953.

¹⁰ See my article, *Free art* in "The Structurist", No. 11, 1971.

The revolt against artistic realism which characterized the avant-garde of the first quarter of the 20th century was an attack against the seemingly immutable reality of bourgeois society and its values, among which perspective was mistakenly included. Realist representation appeared to have given up the struggle with life. It was a shareholder in the cowardly and smug philosophy that belonged to the bourgeoisie — a brother to the glib and uncritical epistemological realism of G.E. Moore and the early Russell. Realism was construed as adapting to, and thus absolving, the pre-existing predatory culture and its values. Here I think immediately of the American artist Sloan's depiction of the virtuosity and nobility of slum life on the roofs of New York City's tenements.

When in this spirit, Picasso abandoned perspective, "he felt that it was a set of rules that had been arbitrarily thrown over 'nature', the parallels which cross on the horizon are a deplorable deception..."¹¹

What I want to point out is that Plekhanov's attempt to extend the principle of negation to all non-realist art and especially to recent art and art history is either silly or dishonest. The process by which production and social development influence artistic representation is far more complex and, indeed, too important a problem to be treated in so shallow a manner. It's probably no more or less objectionable, however, than Gombrich's remarkable discovery that "capitalism doesn't exist", in his truculent review of Hauser's *Social History of Art*.¹² The realist theory of historical materialism must successfully account for the appearance of non-realist theories in order to defend itself. It cannot compete with such theories for that would involve an admission that realist generalization fails. Apart from purely formalistic analyses, which usually do not claim to be theories of art, what traditional sub-theories must be accounted for? They are almost as numerous as aestheticians and art historians, but we can set down the main ones: feeling, emotional expression, intuition, imagination, embodiment of moral or religious values, expressiveness, wish fulfillment, play, empathy. The reasons for this proliferation are complex, but we can identify at least one of them.

We must remember that the romantic and post-romantic periods begin a general departure from realistic representation. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries this tendency had itself proliferated into a sequence of "non-objective" and anti-realist extremes: impressionist, cubist, expressionist, surrealist, futurist, anti-art, conceptual art (even the exaggerated naturalism of the early 20th century is an example.) In order to account for these unorthodox developments, new theories were devised. In some cases a new theory arose as a specific interpretation of a new artistic movement — I believe Worringer's theory to have been such a response. Most often, however, the new theory was framed with sufficient generality so that it could account for any and all departures from realistic representation, or it took as basic certain psychological, physiological, or neurological concepts which enabled the avoidance of the classical issue of imitation (mimesis). It is important to notice that there is no need to suppose, as some Marxists have, that non-realistic theories are *deliberate* attempts to subjectivize and mystify aesthe-

¹¹R. M o t h e r w e l, *The Dada Painters and Poets*, Wittenborn Schultz; New York, 1951, p. 35.

¹²E. H. G o m b r i c h, review of Hauser's *Social history of art*, "The Art Bulletin", March 1953, p. 88.

tics even if that is their effect, for each and every theoretical departure from classical realism simply reflects artistic developments which resist explanation under the old realistic categories. The question, why did Western artistic representation depart from realism, its most enduring tradition, now becomes the more important. This would not be so only if aesthetic theories are not devised to explain the meaning and importance of art. And I believe we are interested in doing just this.

If we take the array of sub-theory types mentioned above as being "limiting cases" of a more general theory that supersedes them, then it would seem highly desirable that such a general theory be realistic unless we are willing to accept a radically mind-dependent (Kantian) interpretation of the subject matter of aesthetics. This being so, the limited application, sub-theories of art tend to converge on realist theory of art,¹³ the scientific and empirical basis of which is (on this interpretation) historical and dialectical materialism. By convergence I mean that it will be possible to assign a referent in the general theory (e.g. an ideological or social structural description) to a referent in the realist theory of art (e.g. a reflection term) which in turn can be assigned to a referent in the sub-theory (e.g. a stylistic term).¹⁴ This kind of procedure is necessary precisely because we abdicate the job of figuring out what makes aesthetic sub-theories good when we relegate our assessment of explanations to mere psychological or formalistic considerations.¹⁵ And since "why" questions and their explanations presuppose interests, we need not apologize for our interest in giving the richest and of the values expressed in art.

In a word, it is perfectly possible to have two or more explanations of a work of art (resulting from the different perspectives and interests of investigators) that are compatible with realist theory. The convergence of such explanations, or their subsumption, can be expected to enrich and extend realist theory of art. Most sub-theories, whether they employ illusion, metaphor, sublimation, empathy, etc., as basic interpretive terms, presuppose a realist vocabulary and therefore a realist theory as a regulative ideal. If, on the other hand, a sub-theory or explanation attempts an entirely subjective account of its object, an account which is irreducible (untranslatable), then that account is false, it is mystification.¹⁶

The most important thing to notice is that what I have written so far is the beginning of genetic theory about art and about theories of art, or about artistic representation and how people have thought about it. However, for a theory of art to be genetic does not make it distinctive. Many non-cognitivist and ideographic theories are genetic in that they purport to discover and trace the genesis of the creative process from the imagination, repressed desires and emotions, etc. Perhaps historical materialism (the theory of art of socialist realism as opposed to its artistic practice) is distinctive inasmuch as it traces the development of theories about art as well as the development of art itself. But even that

¹³ Again compare Putnam *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, Part, Routledge and Kegan P., London 1978.

¹⁴ The best examples of this kind of terminological correspondence are to be found in M. Raphael's works, especially *The Demands of Art*, Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1968.

¹⁵ Putnam: *op. cit.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

may be too much, because there have been at least a few non-Marxist theories that were or are designed to explain the rise and decline of various theoretical interpretations. What is different about historical materialism I will come to in a moment. But first I will suggest that other theories are detached from a general social-historical method and therefore are limited to making extremely subjective and idiographic observations about works of art and about theories. Take, for example, Rudolf Arnheim's attempt to analyze works by Cezanne and Picasso in terms of the subjective tensions between "conscious and unconscious powers", a play of "inner and outer forces" rendered in abstraction.¹⁷ I think Arnheim is good as far as he goes. But the approach of historical materialism enables us to go further because the explanation is framed in terms of how material forces determine cultural expression in general and individual art production in particular. Studies concerned solely with individual perceptions, or individual emotional tensions, can be placed in context. And then we can come to an understanding of how works of art echo the material life process. Take, for example, in contrast to Arnheim, the richer and more complete analyses of Cezanne and Picasso achieved by Max Raphael in his application of historical and materialist dialectics.¹⁸

All of this is not to deny the importance of idiographic perceptual and psychological studies of artists as producers of art because the psychological study of any individual is the study of his or her society written small. Realist theory of art employed as the method of historical and dialectical materialism must acknowledge the value of many other limited explanations of art insofar as they deal with art. The problem is that these limited explanations and sub-theories have not tried to relate art to nature, culture and society as a human response to, or reflection of, these. Or when they do so they do it clumsily. Therefore, for such limiting cases, art becomes an irreducible figment, a mystery, a half told tale. Marxist criticism and interpretation correct this subjectivist tendency.

It was Marx himself who insisted the "human essence is an ensemble of social relations."¹⁹ To understand why art changes, why there were departures from realistic representation, involves an analysis of the times and societies in which these changes took place. We need to know more than the psychology of individual artists. We need to understand them as a class of producers in which their conscious work and its product are the outcome of the real material forces behind cultural expression.

In historical times artists have always and everywhere sought to expand the subject matter of their work as well as the media in which they work. It would be accurate to say that the history of political suppression of the arts from Egyptian times, to Byzantium, to Naziism is a manifestation of attempts to limit or abolish expansion of artistic subject matter (content) or new forms or styles (Zhdanovism was different in that it tried to force new thematic content). The drive to break out of the boundaries of conventional representation arises from the need to express new experiences and perspectives. And as innovations in artistic media reflect parallel technical discoveries and inventions, so also

¹⁷ *Art and Visual Perception*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1954. (USA)

¹⁸ *The Demands of Art*.

¹⁹ *Theses on Feuerbach* No. 6.

does the drive to expand the horizons of subject matter reflect fundamental changes in social relations, social needs, and social values and objectives. For both or these kinds of changes, the technical and the social, are the sources of the new experiences and perspectives that require articulation. It is exactly this reflective process which leads historical and dialectical materialists to assert the priority of content over form. It should also be clear that this relationship corresponds to the assertion of the priority of material production over superstructure and ideology in society in general. But it should also be noted that the claim that new content seeks new form does not impugn formal analysis of artistic structures. Indeed, formal analysis can lead to remarkable insight. But for historical materialism it can never lead to an understanding of the genesis of content and form because formalism, as an explanation, is not genetic. To contrast one method against the other is methodologically inappropriate and misleading. Furthermore, that all explanations may be interest-relative does not mean that some interest-relative explanations are not true. Or, to put it another way, I agree with Marx's conclusion that the interest and values of the proletariat have no inherent tendency to one-sidedness or deception.

A few more points need to be made. First, realist theory of art does not demand a copy theory of expression exclusively any more than realist epistemology demands a correspondence theory of truth exclusively.²⁰ What is required in both is the ability to translate terms in a limiting sub-theory into the vocabulary of scientific realism. Pure, epistemological realism which rests exclusively on passive observation is inconsistent with scientific practice. Scientific realism which incorporates practice as well as observation into its operation is consistent with scientific practice. Likewise, an aesthetic realism, which is formulated as a copy theory, is inconsistent with artistic practice, whereas, an aesthetic realism which combines historical, dialectical and programmatic methods is consistent with artistic practice. Secondly, what I have argued is that all substantive aesthetic sub-theories converge on realism. But what of the ordinary language accounts of aesthetics given by philosophers like Wittgenstein and his followers? I think the answer to this question is that the adequacy of the language of realist theory and of historical and dialectical materialism will ultimately be determined in their success in explanation and in their success as a guide to practice; in their capacity to describe and explain the social world including the fields of culture and the arts. Inasmuch as a "use-meaning" critique of the language of historical materialism and realist theory can only recommend the substitution of another vocabulary by showing that more language users are habituated to its use, it (such a critique) cannot offer substantive objections. And this is for the simple reason that it rejects referential criteria, correspondence method, and truth claims altogether for a kind of linguistic Kantianism.²¹

Returning to the question of art and social change, there seems to be at least one recurring confusion among bourgeois aestheticians that requires clarification. It has to do with "socialist" realism. Whenever the term socialist realism is used it ought to be understood as the name of a *policy* and not an explanatory theory about the development of contemporary and past art. The explanatory theory that is the basis for socialist realist

²⁰ Compare Putnam: *op. cit.*, Part III, *Reference and Understanding*.

²¹ For further elaboration of my views on this problem see my paper *Theories of Meaning*, "Indian Research Journal of Philosophy", Ranchi University, Ranchi, India, 1976.

policy is historical and dialectical materialism. Historical and dialectical materialism does, indeed, give a realist account of the arts. But a great deal of unnecessary confusion is caused by equating the realistic analysis of historical and dialectical materialism with socialist realism as a policy or an artistic manifesto.

It might be supposed, then, that historical and dialectical materialism as an explanation of art historical development is entirely unrelated to socialist realism and that it has nothing to do with socialism. This is false. There is an important connection between the two. In Marxism there is always a direct connection between the theoretical and the programmatic, between theory and practice. This unity of theory and practice in aesthetics exists *because* historical and dialectical materialism is the basis for programmatic socialist realism. As a theoretical basis it guides practice by providing principles for distinguishing decadent and reactionary art works from progressive ones. As theory it suggests that works which distort, or depart from, accurate reflection (not exact, naturalistic imitation) of reality (nature and society) are forms of false consciousness and should be criticized as such. Therefore, it is argued, all future development of art in the transition from capitalism to socialism and communism, the last two of which are understood as more rational and advanced stages of society, should accurately reflect reality.

The undesirable effects of politically administered art, for which Soviet cultural policy has frequently been criticized, is related to this transition. Because if the transition to socialism and the construction of a communist society is deflected, if it appears to be harsh, enforced, sorrowful, and oppressive; instead of joyous, uplifting, liberating, and creative, then what of the artist? Shall he or she be compelled to produce heroic apologies and distortions? Or will it be the task of the artist to ruthlessly expose the real conditions of life? For Marxists acceptance of the second alternative is imperative. Still the issue is not always this easy because, for an artist whose values and consciousness is drenched in bourgeois individualism, the task of building socialism will always appear alienating and oppressive.

This very situation may help to explain why the Critical Theorists, and particularly Adorno, became and remain confounded on the question of how "modernist" art could be both a reflection of bourgeois decadence and hedonism and at once overcome and negate that decadence. Lukacs was correct, I think. Such art cannot. And in abandoning the proletariat as the historical agent of social change, the Critical Theorists also surrendered the realist criteria that makes modern art intelligible as a social datum. For all their talk of Marx, they are not Marxists, but impostors of the tradition.

STRESZCZENIE

Przeniesienie terminu „wartość” na przedmioty kultury, datujące się na przełom XVIII i XIX wieku, świadczy o przenikaniu do sfery kultury pojęć i kategorii ekonomiki rynkowej. Wobec tego, wartości ujmowane są najlepiej w kategoriach interesów, a w szczególności klasowych interesów ekonomicznych, czy to w rozważaniach etycznych czy też estetycznych.

Trwałej wartości w całej historii sztuki nie da się odróżnić od jej realistycznego składnika w przedstawianiu. Dlatego, wszystkie nierealistyczne teorie sztuki skupiają się wokół teorii realistycznej jako regulującego ideału.

Spośród realistycznych teorii sztuki tylko teoria związana z materializmem historycznym i dialektycznym dostarcza genetycznej, społecznej i historycznej metodologii zdolnej w sposób adekwatny skontekstualizować i wyjaśnić wytwory kultury. Tylko ta metoda zapewnia naukowe zrozumienie procesów krzewienia się wartości estetycznej w społeczeństwach.

Na koniec, programowy realizm socjalistyczny jest naturalnym i logicznym następstwem marksistowskiej metody historyczno-dialektycznej.

РЕЗЮМЕ

Перенесение термина „ценность” на предметы культуры, происходящие из перелома XVIII и XIX веков, свидетельствуют о проникновению в область культуры понятий и категорий рыночной экономики. Итак, ценности определяются в категориях интересов, особенно классовых экономических интересов, в этических и эстетических рассуждениях.

Прочную ценность во всей истории искусства не возможно отделить от ее реалистического компонента. Поэтому все нереалистические теории искусства сосредотачиваются вокруг реалистической теории как регулирующего идеала.

Среди реалистических теорий искусства, только теория связана с историческим и диалектическим материализмом доставляет генетическую, общественную и историческую методологию, способную в адекватный способ представлять и объяснить произведения культуры. Только этот метод обеспечивает научное понимание процессов распространения эстетических ценностей в обществах.

Програмный социалистический реализм является естественным и логическим последствием марксистского историко-диалектического метода.

