

In 1939 there is a new edition of H. Focillon's essay *La vie des formes*. A parallel reading of this essay and *Foyers d'incendie* would allow the reader to understand why the systematic approach to forms undertaken by Calas transcends the limits of aesthetics and becomes an epistemological attempt to overturn the too rigid rationalism that seals empiricism in its old or contemporary version.

Despite his profound and sharp observations, Focillon does not manage to construct a theory that could clarify the reasons for which the dualism of form and background that he notes is illusive or the reasons for which form and sign are not identical. Neither does he manage to clarify the laws governing the transformations of the real or the internal logic of forms.

On the contrary, Calas's approach allows us to understand the character and the role of the work that emerges out not only of artistic creation but also of every kind of practice found at the basis of the transformations of objective reality. If, as Bachelard said, every conjecture is synthesis and every application is a transcendence,¹ then the object as object which results from transcendence accomplished by consciousness, makes us think further, proceed to new conjectures and accomplish new transcendences, which are now imbued with the spirit of artistic creation. In this not unending course of transcendences which makes possible transformations and transfigurations, we take the object as the cause of new possible transformations and not as the result of a given transformation. Thus, we take it as a constituent element of the world we move in, part of the environment that delineates us, and part of the horizon that our relation with it opens up before us.

On Metamorphoses

Such an object, result of transcendence which has mediated for its transformations and cause of others to follow, is not a simple sensory datum, as contemporary empiricism still claims. It is a synthesis of feelings within a form we can recall through memory even when the sense-data have shifted from the field of immediate sensory perception. Because the object – whether it is a work of art or an idea, a moral rule or even an experience that our will to express it seals our gestures, movements or words – is the outcome of images whose creation is not due solely to our senses.

¹ See *Le nouvel esprit scientifique*, op. cit. p. 4 and p. 6.

The object, in its deeper reality as an image, demanded for its creation the synergy of all the parts of the psychism, forcing it to shake off the dividing lines imposed by philosophers and psychologists. As such, it suggests the perception of a non-immediately perceived datum such as a formulized material. The object, then, is a form integrally interwoven not only with representations, ideas, intentions, memories and feelings. If we considered the object as a sum total of sense-data, as empiricism does, we would miss its reality and, most importantly, its significance. Because, as a form, the object has a significance it draws from the image that sets it off, an image created through the synergy, as we said, of feelings, emotions, memory and judgment.

As a form, the object is an obstacle that must be overcome, in its turn, through a new process of transformation. Unless we fetishize it in a world whose sole interest would be how to preserve itself. But such a world -which has become our own world in the present- is neither natural nor human, neither artificial nor artificialized. It is technological and technocised.

In a dynamic world, this object – form and obstacle for artistic creation or for any other revolutionary manifestation of creativity – has changed the given movement of consciousness; this is what made it possible. In order to be able to illuminate it, therefore, in what it actually is, in other words as a synthesis of feelings, emotions, and ideas, we cannot break it down to a sum total of sense-data, because then we would miss not only the images it emerged from but also the significance it draws from this emergence.

An empiricist would find it difficult to understand why we abandon the field of immediate sense-data and of representation together with all those methods of precise calculation which would allow us to predict and control the further movement of the phenomenon they depict. After the initial surprise, however, he would have to admit that in his field of calculations and control, the description and analysis of sense-data does not explain the alteration they derive from. Of course, the classical or contemporary empiricist is not interested in changes and their causes; these are charged only to the expert in the study of perception, who is forced to account for them in quantitative terms within an unchanging world. The physicist or the sociologist who study phenomena reduced to sense-data, would be indifferent to alterations. Because for the empiricist who makes such an arrangement, the scientist should deal with the data of observation without giving in to the temptation to explain their genesis. Out of a prejudice which springs from the dullness of his problematics

and less from his fear of the bad influences of metaphysics, he is certain that in a system of thought that managed to reduce qualities to quantities, the measure should be one more logico-mathematically deduced category.

For the new scientific spirit that governs Calas's aesthetics and allows us to trace the epistemological rupture from the traditional science he makes possible, I focus on data resulting from the transformation they go through. Such transformations are not clarified if we calculate the distance covered and defined by geometrical co-ordinates. They are qualitative. The object as form is complex and complicated in its simplicity. The possibility to break it down into simpler elements is contrary to the synthesis from which it draws its reality.

If empiricism reversed the Cartesian proposal "I think, therefore I am" in order to explain understanding through experience, the anti-Cartesian revolution combined with the topological study of phenomena which admit of no quantification, allowed nevertheless the new scientific spirit to clarify the interdependences of thought with the physical and social environment it tried to dominate upon by maximizing control. In the clarification of such interdependences, the concept of change, not any longer as movement in space but as transformation in space-time, played a decisive role. Chemistry – this science of the future, as Bachelard observed – has a lot to teach us about these changes in space-time. Descartes' claim *I think therefore I am*, and the empiricists' *I experience therefore I think* has been long replaced by *I think therefore I change and I change therefore I think*.

If we give some thought to feelings, the first thing we will find out is that they have not much to do (actually, they nothing whatsoever to do) with the feeling of security caused by anything that seems stable and unchanging, only because it conceals the cycle of destruction and creation it undergoes.

The Critical Associative Approach to the Work of Art

In these terms, the approach to the object could not be descriptive because the images its form emerges from, are psychical data and therefore not pure matter. For their observation, we need the synergy not only of the senses but of memory as well. This approach could not be structural either, not because the terms for the approach to the structure of images had not yet been set when Calas was writing *Foyers d'incendie*, but because even if would they had been set, Calas would still focus on the semantic

content of the image. In this sense, it would not be far fetched to say that Calas was an anti-structuralist before structuralism.

The method of the approach to the object, which is form and obstacle at the same time, was necessarily associative. However, the interpretation of the work Calas undertook, on the basis of a critical hermeunetical approach, was not a faithful copy of the Freudian interpretation of dreams. The reason was that Calas expanded the concept of free association.

For Calas, free association was not merely a simple revelation of psychogenetic elements, to the extent that it was the key to the interpretation of the work of art or the object in general, and not only to the therapy of the individual. Contrary to the dreams the individual has in sleep, the work of art is a unique and at the same time general phenomenon.² Therefore, the associations through which one attempts to interpret this phenomenon, do not reveal the latent content of an individual psyche, but the content arising from the struggle with the obstacle that represents the real, in the institutionalization and formulation it has undergone historically and socially. “What the dream is for the individual being, art is for society”, Calas will say. And while the dream is elicited by psychoanalytical practice within the psychoanalyst’s associations, the work of art is there, before us, the result of a sublimation. The surprise or emotion caused by it, introduce us to a similar sublimation process, without the mediation of transference with the psychoanalyst which determines the fate of reaction formation in the psychoanalytical cure. Here, in the work of art, the command is given by the verb image, not by the psychoanalyst. This is what the poet must discover while creating the rhythm of the poem.³

In that sense, the value of the associative approach to an object – that is not the artist or the analysant, but their works – is not psychological but historico-social.

Through such extended associations, the critical hermeunetical approach to the object does not lead to its consecration (something that would limit aesthetics in establishing models of artistic creation that are to be imitated or reconstructed). That would lead to the secondary but annoying consequence of replacing the elite spirit – where the creator is entrenched in his need to protect the integrity of his enterprise – with the logic of the coterie that kills it. On the contrary, it further activates the sublimation mechanism operating on the core of the work’s creation. It would be

² *Foyers d’incendie*, op. cit., p. 36.

³ *Confound the Wise*, New York . Arrows Editions, 1942. 27-28.

enough to consider that a work of art overcomes the obstacles for its recognition after the elimination of the difficulties posed by the institutional mechanisms for the promotion of works of art in the market in order to obstruct, through the silence they enforce, his acknowledgment.

Given this activation of sublimation, the work of art, even the most perfect, or, more correctly, the most shattering functions as an obstacle to the desire; which leads to the creation of a new form, another work of art. Thanks to its sublimation, the given form is transformed from an obstacle into the will of desire to overcome it. Otherwise, human imagination would be content with the masterpieces it has already created and which always belong in the past.

In these terms, the intervention of the critical psychoanalytical approach in the work of art is liberating, not regulatory.

Desire

As we said above, from the given form of the work, the critic, following a course in depth, reaches the images that have set it off.

At this first level, the critic of art realizes that images function as symbols whose significance is not stable, but varies and is differentiated. Images function as symbols because they spring from the desire that is found in the unconscious. In *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, many years later, Castoriadis will observe that the unconscious uses image-symbols not only to express but also to form an indissoluble totality of representations, wills, feelings.⁴ In this major work, the unconscious will be revealed as the field of a radical imaginary where the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary take root and make possible the institutionalization of the historico-social world. But in *Foyers d'incendie*, Calas has already underlined that image-symbols, springing from desire, do not depict an individual condition, but semantic totalities that give rise to emotional states. By facing the image-symbol as the mental obstacle that the creator measures up against in order to give form to his work, Calas focuses on a deepening of understanding desire which is at the root of the artistic endeavor.

Three years later, Susanne K. Langer in her work *Philosophy in a New Key* published in 1942, studies the symbolic modes developed by thought not only in the field of science, mathematics and logic, but also in the field of myth, analogy and metaphor. In this work, she claims that symbolic metamorphoses do not constitute a

⁴ C.Castoriadis, L' institution imaginaire delas societe, op.cit.

manifestation of the conceptual equipment of thought or an expression of the unconscious, but a form of nervous reaction.⁵

Langer, who in her later important studies I dealt extensively with the role of feelings in the creation of forms, here, in an effort to transcend the idealistic, neo-Kantian tradition she comes from, goes the other extreme. In order to avoid the Kantian reduction of images and symbols to the transcendental forms of pure reason, she will attribute it to the neurophysiology of the brain.

Calas continues with the theoretical investigation of images, symbols and form in his later texts. However, even in *Foyers d'incendie*, in his search for the origin of these elements in the unconscious, he had already avoided any kind of reductionism.

We have to consider that this fundamental suggestion – which remains unprocessed and unsystematized in *Foyers d'incendie* so that we cannot claim that it constitutes a complete theoretical view – many years later become the subject of exhaustive study in Castoriadis' *Imaginary Institution of Society*. Here, images and symbols break the ring of logic, aesthetics, and epistemology so that their role in the process of institutionalizing and attributing meaning to historico-social reality is clarified.

Only through such an overall effort of exploration, will it finally be clear that as there can be no form without an image, and consequently function of thought without imagination, in the same way there can be no function of imagination without desire and vice versa. That had already been sensed even by the “strictly rationalist” Kant, when he talked of the depths of the soul where reason draws its creativity from. Kant, however, limited the scope of imagination to the cognitive function of pure reason. Thus, he was forced to dissociate forms from the images they derived from, reducing them to a transcendental formation that exclusively served the needs of rational understanding. The framework within which Kant had to move was that of 18th century rationalism. This rationalism, detached from the traditional metaphysics, was restricted to treat intellect as an instrument capable of functioning independently of intentions and emotions, keeping imagination subordinated to the interest of pure reason in determining and controlling the functioning of phenomena.

Even though dualisms like those of matter and spirit, thought and feeling were called into question, were annulled by post-Kantian idealism and further on by Marx

⁵ S. K. Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, Harvard University Press, 1942.

and Freud, the neo-Kantian and positivist tradition, which still have a very strong hold in the 20th century, keep on cultivating dualistic thought. S.K. Langer, in her effort to overcome dualisms, which fails since she remains faithful to the neo-Kantian tradition where she started from, reduces the conceptual equipment of thought and the image-symbols that feed the former to the neurophysiology of the human brain. She was not the only one to do so. The structuralist Levi-Strauss does the same, starting from the late 40s. And of course the story does not stop here. Every time idealism resorts to materialism, it undertakes a desperate move, through which what it tries to save – the relation with reality – is not saved, because it is not spirit or matter that obscure the way reality and our relation to it are formed, but the trend to reduce it or attribute it either to the spirit or to the matter.

So, we understand why Castoriadis, many years after Calas, returns to Aristotle's *On the Soul* in order to connect its disconnected fragments and, thus, restore the passage from the conscious to the unconscious that instrumental rationalism of early western modernity had been blocking by erecting walls that were demolished only by Freud.

This was also the direction Calas followed before Castoriadis, in his attempt to illuminate a process similar to the imaginary institution, such as the formation of sensation and desire entailed in the creation of an art work. Let us return to Calas, then.

In his investigation of the symbolization of images found at the beginning of the creation of forms, Calas realizes that symbols are not signs of a hidden truth that is revealed, but the stimulants that push us to its pursuit and capture. But the discovery of the symbol and the clarification of its significance for the formation of psychical matter that is achieved through the creation of the work, are not purely rational acts either; they are acts that give rise to feeling and cause emotion.

The feeling and the emotions which were ignored or rather repressed by rationalism, since they were considered irrelevant to the function of *ratio*, play a catalytic role both in the objectification and clarification of the act of creation. Thus, the impact of the emotions on the objectification processes constitutes a dynamic criterion that binds art criticism.

In its framework, the work of art is not seen as the aesthetic result whose analysis would require an examination of its internal movement. Because the work of art, even when it is finished, is still a field of forces that continue to produce

emotional energy similar to the energy that charged the creator's desire to give to qualitative elements their form.

The qualitative elements that comprise the work of art and give rise to emotions when they affect or inspire us, kindle our desire to overcome a given work of art in our attempt to develop another formation. Through such an unceasing emotional movement, the work of art is transformed from an object of inspiration to an obstacle that activates the desire to transcend it.

In these terms, Calas understand why nothing ends through the processes of transcendence entailed in the creation of forms. Every emerging form is a new form developed through the struggle of its creator with an older form, while it simultaneously sparks off the fight it will also be drawn into in its turn, so that something new is born. Thus, the created work functions as the beginning of a new event of creation.

These events of creation may not obey a certain determinism or a necessity, because at their beginning we do not find a rational plan followed by the process of formation – this is true in the next phase – but the stirring up of feeling that incites and activates them.

Through such a clarification of transcendence as a unique event that obeys no laws or any other necessity but only the objective hazard that seems to stir up feelings and the desire they express, we can understand why the deepening of knowledge is impossible without the deepening of desire.

If we go back to the root of transcendence resulting from the creation of new forms where we find feeling, we can finally understand why, as Calas states, “no reality, apart from death, is fatal for desire”. Or, more precisely, I would say, why no desire, except for repressed desire, is fatal for feeling. Otherwise, literature would have centuries ago exhausted its topics and its modes, while life would have exhausted its interest. At this point, the complacency of structural analysis, when it reduces thought and feeling to the function of the brain and expression to the verbal signs of language, is interrupted. In the same way, the bliss of rationalist criticism, when it attempts to shed light on its inadequacies and its deficits by purely rational means, is shaken.

In order for criticism to be not only inspired but critical too, it must shoulder the task of research. Until now, criticism felt this need at the time of its self-criticism, in case it acknowledged its probable deviations from the process of transcendence it is

identified with. For the criticism that undermines its indissoluble bond with research, the emotional movement that generates the work of art remains dark and unthinkable or is buried under the intellectual movement of thought that undertakes its ruin.

But the sensory experience whose data are recorded in our representations is not only sensory. It is, as we have already said, an emotional experience as well. This is ignored as long as we consider the object of thought as a sum total of sense-data and not as a total of quality data that make up its form. From the moment we dissolve the form into the sum of sense-data, and follow them in a space-time determined mathematically, the rhythm and harmony that form the internal time and space of the work of art, also dissolve.

Rational criticism, by analyzing pure sensory experiences, mutilates artistic forms. The attempt to take art out of the slaughter-field of forms and reduce the function of art to sensation, as Deleuze does,⁶ and not to feeling, would not rectify the evil. The only thing we would achieve is to tidy up in a drawer the action of thought in its course from the depths of the soul to the surface it reaches either through determination or through expression.

By tidying up in drawers what thought does, we learned to divide sciences into their special fields, to separate science from ethics, ethics from politics, and all these fields from the field of art. Thus, it is art that shoulders the burden of creating, a burden that equally concerns each one of the split up fields. But the field of art cannot be saved in this way. Because the mechanism through which art forms a synthesis remains dark, and the pursuit if not of unity, at least of unification equally misunderstood.

Unity

Whether one focuses on the difference or not in order to counterbalance the identifying actions attributed to science, the concept of unity remains identitarian or eschatological. Paul Ricoeur also discusses existential and cosmic unity; but even through these further differentiations, the way unity develops is not clarified. This means that we would have to add to the categories of unity Ricoeur discerns, one more category, that of aesthetic unity. But, the pursuit of unity is not a matter related to academic regulations. The critic or the theoretician of art should rather focus on clarifying the way creative action is unifying.

⁶ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Minuit, Paris 1991.

art practices are defined as unifying, because the transcendences that take place in their field do not aim at restoring an order that did not exist until then or was disturbed, but at illustrating a symmetry that was conquered through synthesis. Based on the aesthetic experience and following its data in a reversible time and a non-reversible space, rational thought formulates the concept of order, whose negation alludes to the concept of disorder. Moving along the range determined by order and disorder, rational thought invests its full potential on every kind of organizational procedures.

By illuminating the object in its internal movement, critical thought observes the web of qualitative elements woven by forms. Thus, it realizes that these qualitative elements, formed through the synergy of the senses, imagination and feeling, memory and judgment, are moving within a non-reversible time governed by rhythm, and another one governed by harmony. It is not only the poem the poet constructs that has a rhythm. The world has a rhythm that is altered within us, every time we experience the violation of rhythms.

The concept of symmetry we form based on these qualitative elements results from a processing of the sensory and emotional experience. If symmetry takes place in a movement that is rhythm and harmony, then its transcendence also takes place in a movement equally determined by rhythm and harmony. Why should we consider the philosophers who work on the creation of a poetic world which has rhythm and harmony as paranoid and incurable eschatologists? They are not simply dreaming; they are thinking of the ways this can be possible.

Symmetry

The concept of symmetry in its negation does not refer us to the concept of chaos, since no creation expresses the creator's will to make order out of chaos, but his desire to complete a new synthesis of the existing being or of the world. The artist does not teach us to see by lending us his eyes, but by stimulating our desire to use our own eyes in a different way, thus making our vision more insightful.

The same is true of the philosopher. He does not lend us his thought in order to think, but he stimulates our desire so that we can think more deeply than usually do. It is the same with the rebel who does not undertake for us what we would not dare attempt or experience.

