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MUTUAL INFLUENCES OF VARIOUS CULTURES

The Hellenic standard of beauty was man. The ancient Greeks discovered the golden law of proportions: the basis of proportions was a 1:3 ration in reference to man's face-forehead-nose-chin. Everything seemed to lie in anatomy. Everything in man is humanized, social, everything is a reflection of the comprehensiveness of history and the living experiences of people. Even the anatomic composition embodies not only generally human, but also ethnic and national peculiarities. The standards set by Hellenic proportions do not correspond to all peoples. The canons of beauty contain intransience, historicism, and nationality. It may consequently seem that the dialectics of the national and universally human delve into the unquestionably eternal, „natural”, golden laws of proportion. Here generally human principles in art appear in the most unexpected manifestations of artistic thought.

Among the theoretical concepts of the past, perhaps precisely Russian comparativism (Veselovski and his school of the comparative-historical method in criticism) devoted attention to universally human principles in art. However, the roots of such phenomena of general and similar which coincide in the arts of various nations were seen by comparativists only in the mutual influences of national cultures. Comparative scholars envisaged „wandering plots” as the main form of the literary influence of one national art upon another, and as the main vehicles of the universal human principle of artistic thought.

A theory of mutual influences and effects of national arts reduced to the existing and extremely limited frameworks of travelling plots is,

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naturally, unable to explain the entire significance of generally human and astonishing similarities of plots, thought, forms and ideas in the art of various nations. When we delve deeper into the problematics, we see that these extraordinary similarities cannot be explained solely through the mutual influences of culture. We encounter similarities and cross-sections of culture even where there can not be the slightest question of influence, pressure, wandering plots, or a confrontation of nations.

The Japanese, for instance, have a feast of the Moon. In mid-September, three days to the full moon, when light shadows can be discerned, hardly encroaching on its harmony, the Japanese come out in the evening to admire the moon. An aesthetic feeling here manifests itself through the mingling and conjoining of dissonance into harmony. The most harmonious and symmetrical gateways can be found in the town of Nikko, of which the Japanese say: "He who has not seen Nikko has not observed beauty". As an expression of contemporary beauty, however, the harmony of the edifice is marred: one of the columns is turned inwards.

It is noticeable that other nations increasingly base a sense of beauty on the inclusion of dissonances into harmony. In the magnificent edifices of the ancient Greeks in the Parthenon, the colonnade escapes resembling a prosaic fence because it is totally composed of harmony in dissonance: the harmonious colonnade reveals itself upon careful scrutiny as a row of columns of unequal diameter, with unequal spacings between them, etc.

Such a unification of dissonance into harmony, such a system of beauty through the inclusion of marred symmetry, rhythm and entity into it, is the feature of modern artistic thought. Hence this principle is adhered to by the Soviet composers Shostakovich and Prokofiev. There are innumerable similar examples. The comparative idea of wandering plots and direct mutual influences and loans cannot explain all the complexity of the problem. A solution must be sought elsewhere.

Mankind communes with the same material world, with one, though possibly varied, material environment in which the same laws hold strong. All peoples are surrounded by this same ocean of air, the same starry sky, the same sun shining from the heavens — the same laws of the material world, nature and society, the same psycho-physical and Gnostic laws of learning and thought, the same historical laws of social production, social formations and class struggle are active and manifested in the life

of various peoples. Precisely for this reason, this is the basis of those universally human communities, „proportions”, and even unbelievably astonishing similarities which we encounter when comparing the cultures and art of various nations. Coupled with this, the different and always unique experiences in the historical, life, artistic and psycho-physical spheres of various nations causes the national to be interspersed with the universally human principles and laws in the art of every nation and in the historically class-conditioning of the creativity of each artist. The universally human principle is forcibly asserting itself, together with „proportions”, similarities and general features, as — one could say — the boundlessly distant and varied phenomena of spiritual culture.

How do such coincidences, „proportions” and similarities appear among cultural and artistic phenomena which are historically and geographically distant? Although this community is comprised of the same basic origins — and all people live under the same historical laws — one can, nevertheless, see quite different and extremely specific cases of coincidence and similarity. If we attempt to comprehend the typology of these cases, it would seem to me that four principled groups stand out.

The first type of similarity among artistic phenomena are: similar works, paintings, plots, created in one historical epoch and emerged from the life of different peoples, independent one from the other, thanks to the direct similarity of the living conditions which give rise to them.

The second type of similarity among artistic phenomena has been thoroughly studied, but generalized, for the comparative school of criticism has turned it into a general law. Phenomena which have emerged owing to the influence (e. g. „wandering plots”) of one national art on another are also similar. One should, however, note that — as Marxist dialectics proved — when weighing internal and external causes and impetuses to development, the decisive way is always held by the internal. External influences may only speed up or slow down a process which is determined by internal factors. This is why the influence of one national literature upon another can only boost and stimulate the development of certain artistic phenomena, the need for which matured and originated within the scope of national life.

The third type of similarity of artistic phenomena is conditioned by the general dialectical

law of the spiral type of development. Phenomena which stand at a point of the uppermost bend of the spiral, above a corresponding point of previous development, are repeated on a new basis and in a new manner of the existing features of the previous stage of development.

The similarity of phenomena situated at points which are one above the other on the spiral of artistic development is often visibly noticeable in the history of world art. Thus the features of Hellenic art were repeated on new foundations in the Renaissance, while Classicism reiterated some peculiarities of ancient Roman art, Lessing's rationalistic enlightenment dramaturgy is "repeated" in Brecht's intellectual epic drama, etc.

The most complex, and little-studied is the fourth type of "repetition" of artistic phenomena. It is conditioned by the realization of various cycles of artistic culture.

The Grusian scientist Shalva Natsubidze, I believe, developed the constructive and convincing thesis on the existence of an Eastern Renaissance parallel to that of the West, which began at an earlier date and had quite specific features. A departure from the limited European centralist concept imposes the need for not only the Western, but also the Eastern cycle of development being included in the stands of the history and theory of art. Science has come quite close to the discovery of a general law: that of the repetition of the spirals of artistic development themselves. The interpretation not only of European, but also of American, African, Asian and Oceanian experiences makes it incumbent upon us to follow the parallel historical development of various branches of art and civilization, and moves us to seek the general laws of these different, but in the final reckoning, simultaneous processes. Researchers in the world are today devoting growing attention to these problematics, they appear both in the works of Thor Heyerdal and in the writings of the Soviet explorer Konrad (the book „East and West”).

Not one, but several spirals of general development exist in world art. An artistic phenomenon which is situated at a certain point of the turn of one spiral can be compared to a similar point which stands at the turn of another spiral. The turns themselves can then be situated at various levels.

The same general human economic development, and the existence of the same economic formations through which different peoples pass, cannot avoid creating the same processes in

