CHAPTER 6

THE APPEARANCE OF REAL OBJECTS

Configurations of Sensory Qualities and Objective Interpretation

Two types of the organizing of experimental material enter into the picture in our aesthetic appraisals pertaining to reality perceived directly. In some cases we valuate the arrangement of visual or auditory elements—arrangements of colour patches or sounds—by taking into consideration their quality and location in space or time, hence, only that which is directly given to the senses. In other cases sensory qualities become organized into real objects or concrete phenomena and the appraisal of the sensory shape of reality directly perceived is an appraisal of the appearance or the grouping of the objects which these qualities serve or, as in music, an appraisal of the phenomena connected with real objects (the duet of the piano and the violin, the singing of a well-known artist). Hence, the aesthetic appraisal of concrete objects is also the appraisal of the appearance of a given fragment of reality, but this value of appearance is relativized in a similar way to that of the value of sensory qualities in the appraisal of their arrangement. Relativization is advanced a further step; there we relativized the value of sensory qualities with respect to their arrangement, here we relativize the value of the arrangement with respect to the object which it serves.

Perception of determinate objects is our natural way of looking at reality. If in some domains of art the appraisal of the configuration of sensory qualities, regardless of the object which these qualities serve, is the dominant factor of aesthetic evaluation, then this is so because in these cases that object is indifferent or almost indifferent from the viewpoint of aesthetic contemplation. This often happens in listening to music; the sounds provide us with aesthetic satisfaction regardless of the source from which they flow. We may become enraptured by music without thinking at all about the instruments and the artists. This
is not always so; when an excellent virtuoso is at hand it is not a matter of indifference for aesthetic experiences that the sounds reaching our ears are the tones of a violin of precisely this artist. The aesthetic attraction of the choir is, undoubtedly, influenced significantly by the conviction of the listeners that this superb organization of sounds is a harmony of voices emanating from the throats of many singers. The combined music-making of the orchestra and the choir in Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*, Stravinsky’s *Les Noces* or Szymanowski’s ballet *Harnasie* affects the listener not only by means of the acoustic values of voices and instruments.

Nevertheless, the main source of aesthetic joy in these cases as well is the configuration of sensory qualities. We may disregard all objective circumstances and music will not lose its beauty. One hears at times, after all, that someone wishing to display his admiration for some musical work states: “It was so beautiful that one could forget completely about the concert hall and even about the artist who performed”. Such a stance—listening to music in detachment from reality—is assuredly most common during radio performances (without television) or during listening to music on records.

In the case of architecture the matter is different. We also valuate architectural works, similarly to music and to certain types of decorative arts or modern painting, for their sensory appearance. But, although the play of shapes and colours not interpreted objectively may also be a source of aesthetic experiences in architecture, we usually assume, however, a different stance in respect to architecture. A palace, bridge or cathedral is usually for us, primarily a kind of building—a palace, bridge or cathedral, and our aesthetic valuation of their appearance is usually dependent on the purpose of the building, the material from which it is constructed and other objective circumstances.

Objective interpretation has degrees, conditioned by the knowledge of a given object or objects similar to it and knowledge of its relations with other objects. When I find myself in the Roman Forum in front of Titus’ Arch I may interpret this complex of colour patches in my field of vision as a block of a determinate shape, as a building erected out of hewn slabs, as an arch of triumph, as a Roman arch of triumph erected out of disconnected blocks, etc.