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Aesthetic Relation in Life and in Art

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Abstract
Since antiquity, the problem of the beautiful has occupied a central place in philosophical inquiry. Over time, it became the primary object of a distinct philosophical discipline—aesthetics. However, research in this domain has remained largely speculative, with the phenomenon typically treated in isolation from broader social processes. Contemporary developments in the human and social sciences now make it possible to analyze the beautiful as a specifically social phenomenon—one that occupies a structurally significant position among other social phenomena and fulfills an indispensable function in the operation of the social organism.
On this view, an adequate account of its nature must be grounded in the methods and findings of the natural sciences. The author argues that the aesthetic relation emerges from the evolution of adaptive mechanisms characteristic of living systems. At the level of society, it constitutes a component of the informational subsystem associated with axiological (value-laden) information, as distinct from semantic information, which underlies discursive and scientific cognition. The aesthetic relation enables individuals to perform an affectively mediated evaluation of an object's significance for society and to form a corresponding practical orientation toward it. Art, in turn, functions as a specialized cultural mechanism for the formation of such orientations through its works, grounded in the specific capacities of the artist as a subject of aesthetic production.

Keywords: The Beautiful, Social Organism, Social Consciousness, Axiological Information, Aesthetic Experience, Social Function of Art, Artist as Aesthetic Agent

1. Introduction

In contemporary conditions, the development of science as a social institution has enabled most particular sciences to articulate their foundational assumptions with relative clarity. *Aesthetics*, however, remains a notable exception. Indeed, it is reasonable to ask whether a field can properly be regarded as a science if its central object of inquiry—*the nature of the aesthetic relation* (or, equivalently, *the nature of the beautiful*)—has, over an extended period, resisted even a minimally consensual *definition*. As has been observed, "the traditional strategies for identifying the specificity of the aesthetic relation, firmly established within aesthetic theory, proceed either by reference to special properties of the object or to subjective features of perception and experience" [1, P. 115]. Within *objective idealism*, the beautiful is understood as the instantiation of an idea in an object; within *subjective idealism*, it is construed as the projection of the subject's attitudes onto the object. *Materialist* approaches, by contrast, typically locate the beautiful in properties taken to be immanent to the object itself (such as harmony, symmetry, or proportion). The most promising accounts are those that relate the properties of the object to the perceiving subject. However, a more adequate understanding requires a further step: the object of aesthetic experience must be situated not merely in relation to the individual subject, but within the framework of *social totality*.

In this sense, an individual's aesthetic relation to an object does not express immediate pragmatic interests or "particular ends," but rather discloses the object as contributing to the enrichment and expansion of life—that is, it involves a form of *socially mediated evaluation*. This line of thought is anticipated in Immanuel Kant's claim that the beautiful is that which pleases universally without the mediation of a concept [2, P. 79]. What many theorists ultimately converge on—albeit with significant qualifications—is Kant's notion of the *disinterestedness* of aesthetic judgment. Yet this raises a fundamental difficulty: does disinterestedness imply functional *irrelevance* for the subject? If aesthetic experience is indeed characterized by the absence of external ends—if "its end lies within itself, in the very act of aesthetic contemplation" [3, P. 45]—then how can it be reconciled with a naturalistic account of human capacities? It is implausible that, in the course of biological and social evolution, a

capacity devoid of adaptive or functional significance would be preserved and refined.

At this point, a crucial distinction must be introduced. Human beings are not merely biological but social agents. Consequently, they may possess capacities that are not instrumentally useful at the level of the *individual* organism, yet are indispensable at the *level of society*. As with biological evolution, the development of social systems involves the stabilization of structures and functions that enhance the system's capacity to interact effectively with its environment. If the aesthetic relation has emerged and persisted in the course of social development, it must perform a function essential to the reproduction of *social life*. Only under this condition can the paradox be resolved whereby "the individual derives disinterested pleasure from what is highly beneficial to the *species*" [4, P. 365]. Importantly, this function appears to be closely tied to the processes of information acquisition, evaluation, and integration.

Accordingly, if one adopts a social-functional perspective on aesthetic experience, the analysis must begin not with the phenomenon as immediately given, but with the conditions of its possibility—that is, with the *social needs* that necessitate its emergence. Otherwise, as has been aptly remarked, "aesthetic theory is a logically vain attempt to define what cannot be defined" [5]. This impossibility, however, applies only to purely phenomenological approaches; it does not preclude explanation by alternative, theoretically mediated means. For this reason, the inquiry must proceed, as it were, *ab ovo*—from first principles. Although this path is methodologically more demanding and requires engagement with issues that may initially appear extraneous to aesthetics, it is only through such an approach that one can arrive at a rigorous account of the social function and, consequently, the essential structure of the aesthetic relation.

2. Something about information processes in society

Every living self-organizing system (i.e., a biological organism) exists within its environment through interaction with it. This interaction enables the system to reduce its internal entropy, the spontaneous increase of which ultimately leads to the destruction of any material object. For this reason, organisms "feed on negative entropy, that is, they transfer order (negentropy) from nutrients into themselves" [6]. However, to do so, an organism must, first, possess the *physical capacity* for such interaction and, second, correctly determine the *appropriate mode of action*. Accordingly, any sufficiently developed organism includes two specialized subsystems: an operational subsystem (a set of effector organs) and an informational subsystem (sensory organs and the central nervous system).

Human *society*, which can likewise be regarded as a self-organizing biological system, represents the *highest stage* in the development of life. A key distinction between humans and other *biological organisms* lies in the significantly higher level of development of the central nervous system. Nevertheless, the effective functioning of society as an integrated system *within its environment—nature*—is ensured primarily through the formation of *uniquely social mechanisms*. Although these mechanisms are connected with the brains of individual members, they are fundamentally social in character, since they *arise exclusively through interactions* among individuals as elements of society.

Material interaction with the environment is carried out by society through its members in the form of the *production process*. This process involves both the effectors of individuals and auxiliary material objects—means of production. Together, they constitute the *operational* subsystem of society—its *technosphere*. We will not examine this process in detail here, as it is only indirectly related to our topic. Our focus lies on the second subsystem—the *informational* one—which governs the first, namely the *noosphere*. The latter is grounded in the cognitive apparatuses of the individuals composing society.

A powerful analytical apparatus serves each human being, as it does higher animals, as a tool for adaptation to the environment. However, in humans this apparatus is not only more powerful; more importantly, it provides the basis for constructing an incomparably *more powerful analytical structure* composed of *interconnected individual cerebral systems*, which regulates the activity of society as a whole. The *integration* of informational processes occurring in the brain of an individual with analogous processes in other members of the same society gives rise to an entirely new phenomenon—one absent in earlier biological evolution—namely, *social consciousness*.

Social consciousness is directly realized in the form of *cognitive processes* occurring within the cerebral structures of each individual. However, due to *the dual nature of the human being*—simultaneously a relatively autonomous organism and an element of society—thinking, while unified, manifests itself in two distinct forms. External signals from various objects are perceived by the senses and, due to the presence of a certain "stock of information" (a thesaurus) in the brain, are transformed into *information* about these objects, encoded in neural structures in the individual's personal codes. The subsequent processing of this information proceeds in two different ways. Accordingly, it is customary to distinguish two types of human thinking: *practical* thinking and *theoretical* thinking [7, 8].

Practical thinking operates with *ideal images* of objects in the external world as represented in neural structures, and consists in processing information directly related to the individual's practical activity. It represents a further development of the information-processing and utilization mechanisms characteristic of higher animals. As a result, a "command to act" is generated, implemented through *effector organs*—muscles or glands—whose functional states are determined by reflexes as the terminal elements of the reflex arc. The principal qualitative distinction between human practical thinking and the reflex activity of animal brains lies in its interaction with theoretical thinking.

Theoretical thinking, by contrast, is associated with ensuring that an individual's actions correspond to the needs of *society as a whole*. It is integrated into the general system of information processing of the social organism (i.e., *social consciousness*). In this case as well, the individual's effectors are employed, but now for informational *interaction* with other individuals. This interaction is mediated by special *material* objects—*signs* [9]. Accordingly, the brain recodes information into "external" codes formed in the course of social practice and therefore *shared by the community*. Theoretical thinking in sign form is oriented primarily not toward direct action upon natural objects, but toward *understanding their essence,* especially

in relation to the *needs* of the social organism as a whole.

In accordance with these needs and the achieved level of understanding, theoretical thinking—representing *social consciousness* within each individual through personal consciousness—formulates a *directive* concerning the *general orientation* of the individual's activity with respect to a given object. This directive is then transmitted (either directly or again via signs) as an initial setting to practical thinking, which governs the individual's concrete actions. Thus, these actions ultimately result from, and depend primarily upon, the outcomes of *social information processing*. All particular mechanisms of such processing are directed toward producing results necessary for the functioning of society. Consequently, it is within this framework that one must seek the role played by the aesthetic relation to reality.

Before turning to this issue, however, it is necessary to clarify the concept of information itself. For any self-organizing system, *information* is not an *independent* attribute of matter, such as mass or energy, as is often assumed. Rather, it is inseparably connected with the life activity of *specific living systems* and is immanent to them. As the founder of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener, argued, "information is the name for the content of what is exchanged with the external world as we adjust to it and make our adjustment felt upon it" [10, P. 31]. The processes of acquiring and using information are processes of adaptation to the contingencies of the external environment and of functioning within it. Only the "consumer" (i.e., the self-organizing system) *perceives* external material signals as *immaterial information*. Without a perceiving subject (even a hypothetical one), there is no basis for speaking of information—signals remain merely natural *material consequences* of processes occurring in the environment, and nothing more.

In this sense, information is a *subjective* phenomenon. Material signals become information only insofar as they directly or indirectly contribute to fulfilling the fundamental task of any self-organizing (living) system—namely, the *continuation of life*. Apart from this function, however complex its mediation, they constitute merely a set of physical signals devoid of informational content. In the social context, the interpretation of signals as information is a function of the human being—and ultimately of society. For an artificial intelligence system, by contrast, such a set remains merely a *collection of signals*, which it has been designed by society to process in a particular way. Thus, to reiterate: information is *subjective in nature*, in the same sense that *any reflection of reality* by a self-organizing system is subjective. Only such a system *interprets incoming signals* in accordance with *its functional goals*, transforming them into *information* on the basis of its existing thesaurus. No such phenomenon exists in inanimate nature (as distinct from the *organization* of matter, of which information is, in a certain sense, a reflection for the system). Something analogous occurs in the animal world; however, in humans, due to their social nature, information itself acquires a *social character*.

3. Mental Processing of Information

Accordingly, the very nature of information depends directly on the possibility of its acquisition and processing through thought, which is to a significant extent determined by its quantitative characteristics. A living organism situated within its environment (nature) has greater chances of survival and development the more accurately and extensively it perceives and analyzes information derived from signals accompanying diverse processes in the surrounding world. This holds true for all living organisms; hence, evolution has largely been directed toward the fullest possible realization of this capacity. This tendency reaches its most developed form *in human society.*

However, even within human society, as François de La Rochefoucauld aptly observed, "to attain true knowledge of things, we must know all their particulars; yet since these are nearly infinite, our knowledge is always superficial and imperfect." Similarly, Vladimir Vernadsky maintained that even in science "immutable scientific truth constitutes that distant ideal toward which science strives and upon which its practitioners constantly labor. Only certain, still very limited, portions of the scientific worldview are incontrovertibly established or fully correspond, at a given time, to formal reality and thus qualify as scientific truths" [11, P. 15]. On the basis of available information—and depending *on the quality of its processing*—both *true* and *false* conclusions may be drawn. Under conditions of incomplete information, however, a third outcome becomes likely: error (misconception), in which the false appears as true (and vice versa). This is all the more characteristic of everyday life, both at the level of society and of the individual, where action *invariably unfolds under conditions of informational insufficiency.*

When an organism receives information about a given phenomenon in the external environment, a crucial factor is knowledge of its connections with other phenomena. If the organism fully understands the regularities governing these connections, they assume a *deterministic* character. If not, they appear random (i.e., *relatively* non-deterministic). This implies that events dependent on unaccounted-for factors are, in principle, unpredictable. Yet the situation changes qualitatively once we shift from considering isolated random events to their aggregate. The random features of the factors (or sets of factors) producing a given event "mutually compensate for one another in the aggregate; as a result, despite the complexity and apparent disorder of individual random phenomena, we obtain a relatively simple regularity that holds for the mass of such phenomena" [12].

The emergence of *regularity*, as opposed to randomness, makes it possible to analyze a phenomenon—but now in terms of the *probability* of its occurrence, that is, through probabilistic-statistical analysis. Such analysis does not provide absolute certainty regarding the presence or absence of a phenomenon, and therefore cannot guarantee the achievement of a given goal. Yet this does not render such information useless. While it lacks certainty, it encompasses a far greater range of environmental signals, thereby enabling responsiveness even to *potential random* events. On its basis, no single unequivocal program of action can be constructed; however, its evaluation makes it possible to select, among possible courses of action, the one most appropriate for achieving a goal under given conditions. At the same time, it provides an additional motivational impetus through an affective response—namely, *emotion*.

At present, there is no single, universally accepted theory of emotions. A number of competing approaches define their nature in different ways. For example, according to the basic evolutionary theory of emotions, "the evolutionary, or classical, view of emotions … posits a set of natural,

discrete, primary emotions … universally hard-wired to enable individuals to adaptively respond to fundamental life tasks." Constructivist (psychological) theories treat emotions as being "constructed" by the brain (or culture) out of more fundamental affective and cognitive processes: "emotions depend on how individuals interpret or appraise situations … along dimensions such as goal congruence, expectedness, certainty, agency, and controllability" [13]. Within dynamical systems theory, "emotions are conceptualized as emergent, self-organizing, adaptive responses … [arising from] interactions among … stimuli, cognitive processes, physiology, expressions, [and] subjective experiences."

Without entering into a detailed analysis of these and other theoretical approaches, we will here treat emotions as a *spontaneous response* of the organism to *possible changes in the conditions* for satisfying its vital needs—conditions essential for its existence and development. Indeed, it is precisely for this purpose that the organism interacts with its environment, undertaking actions based on a rational analysis of circumstances, in the direction and to the extent required for need satisfaction.

Yet action—preferably successful action—must often be undertaken under conditions of uncertainty. Two modes of information processing are employed for this purpose. According to Alexander Vvedensky, when an inference is drawn from a judgment, "our reasoning may occur in two forms. In some cases, we arrive at conclusions such that it is entirely clear to us why we must reach these conclusions rather than others; and we are able to account for this not only to ourselves but also to others. Therefore, we regard such conclusions not merely occasionally but always as binding, and we can even demonstrate their necessity to others. … At other times … we experience a form of thinking in which we arrive at conclusions whose necessity is recognized only by the person who has drawn them … and we do not yet understand why the conclusion must be such rather than otherwise, nor are we able to demonstrate its necessity to others … Yet in many cases it turns out that our initial conclusion, whose necessity we at first merely felt rather than understood, was entirely correct."

The "mode of thinking" in which we "immediately apprehend or feel the necessity of the resulting judgment"—that is, which is "of a simplified or abbreviated character," whereby we "as if by means of a special mental eye perceive from afar the final conclusion"—he calls *intuitive* thinking. The other, in which "we traverse all premises in full," he terms *discursive* thinking [14, P. 346-348]. These reflections arise from his focus on logical thinking oriented toward understanding, within which he attempts to situate that which is "merely felt rather than understood."

Many other scholars have likewise noted that, in addition to different types of thinking, this process can occur in different forms. For instance, Eduard von Hartmann, in his *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, also distinguished "two methods" of thinking: the deductive (or discursive) and the intuitive. The former derives its proofs gradually, through a series of inferences from given premises, corresponding to the discursive nature of conscious logic. The latter renounces such claims, appealing instead to natural feeling and common sense, and through *intellectual intuition* conveys, in a single moment, what the deductive method arrives at through laborious demonstration—often even more. This method presents its results to consciousness *as irresistibly compelling* in logical terms: they must be accepted *immediately*, without deliberation or hesitation [15]. Such *intuitive* conclusions can yield striking results that may initially be accepted without proof. Even Albert Einstein acknowledged: "I trust in intuition."

In other words, we are dealing here either with *conscious* or with *subconscious*—but in both cases logical (deductive)—thinking that leads to a *definite conclusion*. Logical thinking is rightly regarded as the highest form of cognition, *insofar as it mediately corresponds to the operation of natural laws in the real world*. However, the incompleteness of information often hinders the effective application of logical (rational) thinking at both conscious and subconscious levels. A lack of knowledge frequently leads to error; when such error underlies a program of action, it can significantly complicate the task of survival and development in society.

An intuitive solution to a given problem is valuable insofar as it formulates a provisional *final conclusion*, providing a heuristic orientation for subsequent conscious logical reasoning. However, due to the absence of all necessary grounds, the risk of error is particularly high. Therefore, intuition cannot *serve as a reliable foundation for a program of real action*. Such a program is ultimately formed on the basis of *rational-logical* processing of information. Nevertheless, the results of intuitive (*probabilistic-statistical*) processing are often indispensable in the execution of action—specifically in cases where no *unambiguous* program can be derived through rational-logical means alone. In such situations, *probabilistic-statistical evaluation* comes into play.

4. Semantic and Axiological Information

This problem arose long before the emergence of humans and their capacity for thought. Animals, in order to achieve favorable outcomes, likewise had to evaluate objects in their environment in terms of their usefulness or danger for the survival of the individual. They did so under conditions of significant informational deficit (incomplete information). To cope with this, a specific method of pragmatic evaluation of situations evolved, one that involves not only *two distinct mechanisms* of information processing, but also *two different ways of using* their results in the activity of a living organism.

Accordingly, two types of action may be distinguished. The first consists of actions based on a "stimulus–response" scheme that directly achieve a goal. The second arises when an animal's actions aimed at achieving a goal cannot be rigidly determined, since the available information does not allow for an unambiguous assessment of the pragmatic significance of particular features of a situation. Very often, animals are "forced to satisfy their needs under conditions of chronic *information deficit* and to act on the basis of whatever information is available at a given moment. This circumstance has required special forms of adaptation, a special physiological apparatus, which in its developed form constitutes the physiological mechanism of emotions in higher animals and humans." Thus, emotion may be understood as "a system of generalized evaluations which, disregarding many other properties of an object, provides a preliminary answer to a single question: is the object beneficial or harmful, even when the animal encounters it for the first time." It is "a compensatory mechanism that makes up for the deficit of information necessary to achieve a goal (satisfy a need)" [16, P. 56, 23, 36]. In other words, emotion

"represents a reaction that includes an immediate—one might say instinctive—positive or negative evaluation of objects or processes in objective reality" [17, P. 155].

Thus, part of the information received by a self-regulating system (a biological organism) from the external environment makes it possible to establish a rigid, strictly defined, and fully determined relation—given the system's level of complexity—between aspects of an object or phenomenon, between these aspects and the surrounding world, and ultimately to produce a clearly defined line of behavior appropriate to the situation. This portion of the total information may be termed *semantic information*. Semantic information leads to action after appropriate processing. This may take the form of automatic responses of simple organisms to stimuli; complex instinct-driven behaviors of insects in response to sequential signals; responses of higher animals formed through conditioned reflexes; and, finally, the elaborate and diverse responses of humans based on the conscious processing of information through the apparatus of formal-logical thinking.

Another (and significantly larger) portion of information cannot be used in this way, since its complexity and the limited capacities of the system do not allow for the establishment of regularities linking its source with the environment, nor for a precise determination of its significance for the system. In the case of humans, this portion of information cannot be processed by means of rational-logical (formal) thinking in the way semantic information can. This fact defines the role and significance of formal thinking in human cognition: "In the developed consciousness of the modern human being," as Academician A. N. Kolmogorov noted, "the apparatus of formal thinking does not occupy a central position. It is rather a kind of 'auxiliary computational device,' activated as needed" [18, P. 26]. The significance of the other portion of information for the system is determined not by rational-logical "computation," but probabilistically and statistically.

Information processed statistically does not allow for the unambiguous determination of the system's responses. First, the direct pragmatic evaluation of statistical information is difficult due to its diversity and abundance. Second—and most importantly—it lacks universality (being subject to fluctuations). Therefore, on its basis, the system cannot develop a rigidly determined line of behavior. Probabilistic-statistical information can only serve to provide a *generalized* assessment of the *value* of a situation or phenomenon for a given system, abstracting from the specific character of that value. It is used in the formation of emotions—a stimulus to action that indicates *not a program*, but a *direction* of action, and that serves as its motivating force. Let us define this as *axiological information*.

Depending on specific circumstances, the balance between the rational and the emotional may vary. When the path to a goal is clearly known, the "rational" character of action predominates. Under strong motivational drives, even considerable uncertainty cannot inhibit action; in such cases, action takes on the character of affect. Considering this issue, I. P. Pavlov wrote: "Thus, there are two modes of action. After, so to speak, a preliminary examination (even if it occurs almost instantaneously) of a given tendency by the cerebral hemispheres, transforming it, to the appropriate degree and at the appropriate moment, into a corresponding motor act or behavior—this is rational action; and action (perhaps even directly through subcortical connections) under the influence of the tendency alone, without that concrete control-this is affective, passionate action" [19, P. 376].

Thus, axiological information, as applied to a living organism, gives rise to an emotional response. Like "automatic" responses, emotional reactions are conditioned-reflex in nature; however, due to their stochastic basis, the formation of conditioned connections is more complex, arising from the statistical selection of features that characterize a given property from a pragmatic standpoint. Based on the processing of *axiological information*, such reactions serve not only as a mechanism compensating for probabilistic-statistical influences of the environment in animals, but also play a crucial role in human life. "Emotion," wrote I. P. Pavlov, "is what directs your activity, your life—it is emotion" [20, P. 140]. A statistically formed conditioned reflex is realized in a specific emotion (a stimulus to action) through the mechanism of associations. A set of associative links forms a closed chain that "activates" the corresponding emotion. The character of the external reaction, and the sequence of its elements, are determined by the *semantic information* available in the given situation.

5. The System of Human Needs

The interaction of a living organism with its environment is determined by the necessity of securing its existence and development. To this end, it requires certain objects and activities. Psychologically, this necessity is expressed in its *needs*, the satisfaction of which becomes the *concrete goal* of the organism's activity: "No one can do anything without at the same time doing it for the sake of one of their needs and for the sake of the organ of that need" [21, V. 3, P. 245].

Any organism, including the human being, possesses a range of needs that are typically reduced to some kind of system. At present, many such systems exist. There is little point in analyzing them all, since today only one system enjoys broad popularity—the so-called *Maslow's hierarchy of needs*. Maslow himself, strictly speaking, was not the direct author of this "pyramid," but it was constructed by his followers on the basis of the hierarchical scheme he proposed. According to this model, physiological needs lie at the base of the pyramid. Cultural needs are built upon them, and the pyramid is completed by "higher" needs. This also determines the order (and urgency) of their satisfaction—from the bottom upward [22]. From our point of view, however, this approach remains phenomenological, relying on external features and failing to disclose the essence of the phenomenon. We consider a genetic (i.e., developmental and origin-oriented) approach to be more adequate for this purpose.

With the emergence of life, primitive organisms arose and existed within a certain environment suitable for their functioning and providing them with nutrients. In order to fulfill their objective role in the continuation and development of life, each such organism had to reproduce. This constituted the primary "need," embedded in its structure and mode of functioning. As evolution proceeded and both species and individual organisms became more complex, the need for nourishment and for maintaining suitable conditions of existence became increasingly significant. Without going into detail, we may say that this process resulted in the emergence of needs for resources enabling exchange with the environment, as well as needs for the conditions of existence themselves. These became

the fundamental needs both of higher animals and of *humans as biological beings*.

Thus, *in this capacity*, the human being possesses all the needs characteristic of higher animals. First, there is the need that ensures the continuation of the species—the sexual (reproductive) need. Second, there are needs that ensure the existence of the individual organism: 1) the need for metabolic exchange with the environment in order to reduce entropy (air, water, nutrients, etc.); 2) the need for adequate conditions of existence (temperature, humidity, absence of threats to health and life, etc.). To these, however, one more need should be added—one associated with the functioning of the organism as such. An organism is not a machine that can be turned on and off at will. In most cases, it must function continuously as long as it is alive. Therefore, it also has an essential need: 3) the need for constant moderate physical and mental activity.

However, the human being is a creature that appears in the environment in "three roles": 1) *as a representative of the species*; 2) *as an individual biological organism*; and 3) *as an element of a higher-level biological system—society*. In each of these roles, the individual is the sole acting agent. Consequently, in order to ensure the existence of society, every individual must possess all types of needs, including those that reflect the requirements of society as a whole. Like all other needs, these *are inherent in the individual*, but in essence they are *not personal* but *social needs*. Since needs express a relation between their subject and their object, and since only a concrete individual as a bearer of consciousness can have a psychological capacity for such relations, we can speak of social needs only as the needs of the individual (in the psychological sense), in which the needs of society (in the ontological sense) are mediated. What functions do these needs perform?

First, it is necessary to ensure the existence of society as a set of interacting individuals. For this, beyond mere awareness, there objectively exists in each individual a need for *communication*. This need reflects not only the impossibility of living in isolation but also the impossibility of becoming and remaining human outside communication with others. Second, within this interaction, the individual as an element of society strives to occupy a definite position within it, asserting themselves in public opinion and seeking the highest possible *social status*. Third, the individual must possess both the capacity and the need to *evaluate*, in the course of their activity, the *social utility* of material objects and phenomena.

Thus, in addition to one species-level need and three individual needs, every person must possess three types of needs reflecting the requirements of society. Together they form an integrated system that determines the direction and character of human functioning in all its "aspects." Each type of need is concretely expressed in a striving toward diverse objects and activities that satisfy these needs under specific conditions. However, there are significant differences among them. The sexual (species-level) need motivates the individual to act, but its ultimate result serves not the individual, but the species. Individual needs, directed toward satisfying physiological requirements, ensure the biological conditions of the individual's existence. Social needs, in turn, function as psychological drivers of actions ultimately aimed at maintaining the *unity of society*.

To actively motivate individuals to satisfy their needs, they receive a certain "compensation" in the form of pleasure (enjoyment). Nature "rewards" the individual for efforts expended in satisfying needs. This applies to all needs—both individual and those that are not biologically necessary for the individual (species-level and social needs). Therefore, the immediate stimulus of behavior is either the pursuit of pleasure associated with need satisfaction or the avoidance of the discomfort caused by its deprivation.

According to the *Oxford Languages* dictionary, *pleasure* is a feeling of happiness arising from pleasant sensations or experiences, while *enjoyment* is defined as its highest degree. While the definition of pleasure is acceptable, the interpretation of enjoyment as merely a higher degree is questionable. Enjoyment, like pleasure, brings satisfaction; however, unlike pleasure—which is a static phenomenon determined by the difference between a state of deprivation and a state of full satisfaction—enjoyment is dynamic. It is determined by the intensity of the process that satisfies the need. In mathematical terms, enjoyment may be described as the first derivative of the process of need satisfaction: it typically reaches its maximum at the beginning and declines to zero as full satisfaction is achieved. For example, after entering a warm room from the cold, one may experience pleasure from warmth for quite a long time. But the enjoyment experienced in the very first moment of contact with a heat source is of a different order.

The action of the *species-level* (sexual) need is directed toward an individual of the opposite sex. *Individual* needs ensure the biological existence of the person through interaction with the environment. *Social* needs, in contrast, are primarily directed toward other individuals who constitute society. Each of these three categories of needs has its own objective function, and their realization involves both social relations and material objects that mediate these relations. The first is largely satisfied automatically through co-existence, though individuals also establish personal social ties. Together, these ensure the unity of society as an integral super-organism. The second determines the goal of individual functioning within this whole—namely, the enhancement of social status, which stimulates social activity. The third provides an evaluation of both the results of such activity and natural objects in terms of their social utility. Unlike the first two, which still relate to individual concerns, this third need pertains to *society as a whole*.

In practice, these needs can only be distinguished analytically, since they operate jointly and often through the same forms of behavior and material means. Externally, actions may appear directed toward entirely different goals—power, wealth, scientific or athletic achievement, or success with the opposite sex. In reality, however, the underlying aim is the same: the enhancement of one's *social status*, shaped by circumstances and personal preferences. At the same time, the need for social interaction is also being satisfied, further complicating the picture. The third need—the need for a positive evaluation of the social significance of objects and processes—stands somewhat apart, since it is not directly connected with the individual's personal needs and therefore requires special clarification.

6. The Social Nature of the Aesthetic Attitude

Society is an complex organism, one that continues to grow more complex as it develops. Consequently, the needs of society appear to the individual (especially within antagonistic social formations) as an external force "whose origins and tendencies of development remain unknown to

them" [21, V. 3, P. 33]. "Individuals, as well as groups, may correctly understand the immediate results of their actions—in this sense, their actions are conscious. However, they typically remain unaware of the broader social consequences of these actions; in this respect, their behavior is blind and spontaneous" [23, P. 100]. Therefore, while the character of actions (i.e., the program of action) is determined through rational-logical evaluation of circumstances, the selection among possible programs cannot be carried out purely on this basis. As in animals, this selection is mediated by emotions. "Biological" emotions in humans, analogous in certain respects to those found in animals, serve the same function: they facilitate the selection of actions beneficial to the individual. By contrast, "social" emotions possess a specificity determined by the nature of the whole they serve.

The specificity of society as a "super-organism" lies primarily in its functional rather than structural unity. Whereas an animal can emotionally determine an appropriate course of action based on an "evaluation" of its environment—an evaluation that ultimately reflects the pragmatic significance of that environment for survival—in humans the situation is far more complex. The environment within which an individual acts and which they evaluate is not identical to the environment in which society as a whole operates, and upon whose correct assessment its functional unity depends. Thus, evaluation mediated by "social" emotions reflects social significance only in a highly indirect manner. Since individuals perform only partial functions necessary for society, they may lack any representation of their cumulative effect. It is fortunate if they can at least roughly situate their actions within the broader process, yet this is rarely achievable in practice, since "the many individual volitions active in history generally produce results quite different from those intended—often directly opposed to them" [21, V. 29, P. 306-307]. The more developed a society becomes, the more complex this situation grows.

Even so, "primitive humans, living in society, did not satisfy hunger by directly seeking food; rather, they pursued this goal indirectly, as participants in collective labor performing specific functions (for example, producing tools for communal hunting). Thus, the goal was achieved through the execution of actions that, not immediately and not in isolation, but only in conjunction with the actions of others, led to its realization" [24, P. 421]. In such conditions, immediate emotional reactions at the individual level were insufficient. What was required were social emotions arising from a generalized emotional evaluation of phenomena—reactions expressed not so much in direct action as in the formation of a particular attitude that shapes the overall orientation of individual behavior.

As a result, two types of relation to reality emerge in human consciousness, which in their unity and interaction constitute consciousness itself. Each of these domains ("biological" and "social") includes components grounded in the processing of both semantic and axiological information. Accordingly, the structure of social consciousness comprises two components:

- A *rational-logical* relation, which determines the intelligible social significance of phenomena and provides the basis for forming programs of action;
- An *emotional* relation—namely, social emotions—which, through a generalized evaluation of social significance, generates motivation for socially useful behavior that sustains the integrity of the social organism.

Thus, problem-solving involves not only logic but also emotions. The aim of logic is truth, whereas the aim of emotions is value—that is, a (largely unconscious) assessment of correspondence to the needs of both the individual and society [25]. Without a subjective component tied to the needs of a given system, value judgment is in principle impossible [26]. Among "social" emotions, only one type possesses this property in a fully developed form: *aesthetic emotion*, in which the *aesthetic attitude* toward reality is realized. All other forms of social emotion are derivative.

Accordingly, aesthetic emotions—i.e., the aesthetic relation to objects and phenomena of the surrounding world—are elicited in humans by these objects and phenomena insofar as they are apprehended in terms of their social significance. In other words, "the subjective aesthetic attitude of the individual toward a given phenomenon is ultimately conditioned by the objective relation of that phenomenon to society, to the social human being, by its objective significance for social development" [27, P. 114]. This is why such experiences yield pleasure and enjoyment.

From the foregoing, we may define the *aesthetic attitude* as a psychological mechanism for resolving the contradiction between, on the one hand, the *necessity* for society *to function as a unified organism* confronting its environment as a whole, and, on the other hand, its capacity to function *only through individual agents*. The system of the aesthetic attitude is activated on the basis of axiological information within the process of social practice, which also determines its concrete content. As has been noted, "*human nature* provides the capacity for aesthetic tastes and concepts, but the *conditions of life* determine the *realization* of this capacity—explaining why a given society, people, or class possesses precisely *these* aesthetic tastes and not *others*" [4].

Similar ideas concerning the distinction between knowledge-bearing and emotion-inducing information have been expressed previously. For example, A. Moles, in *Information Theory and Aesthetic Perception*, distinguishes between semantic and aesthetic information from the standpoint of an observer external to the "source–channel–receiver" system. For him, "semantic information, governed by universal logic, prepares action, whereas aesthetic information is "personal" and does not aim at decision-making; it is non-utilitarian in character" [28, P. 203-204].

Immanuel Kant likewise maintained that logical and aesthetic judgments differ in nature: "a judgment of taste is not a cognitive judgment; hence it is not logical but aesthetic" [2, V. 5, P. 365]. Charles Batteux distinguished two modes of relating to nature: viewing it as an independent object (pure reason) and in relation to oneself (aesthetic taste) [29, V. 1, P. 35]. Many philosophers have interpreted aesthetic emotions as fulfilling, in various forms, the function of motivating action. Thus, David Hume, discussing the relation between reason and taste, wrote that "reason yields knowledge of truth and falsehood, while taste provides a sense of beauty and deformity, virtue and vice. Reason, being cold and disinterested, does not motivate action; taste, by producing pleasure or pain, becomes its cause" [30, P. 263]. This formulation captures the idea that cognition provides a program of behavior, whereas aesthetic emotions supply the impetus for its realization.

The reflection of reality by the social human being is a unified process involving the perception and processing of all incoming information. Rational-logical thought (the "scientific" attitude) and the aesthetic attitude represent two modes of socially mediated processing of this information within consciousness, both serving pragmatic purposes. Equally necessary for maintaining the integrity of the social organism, they constitute *complementary aspects of social consciousness*. In their interaction, they form its internal structure and are present in all its forms, including science and philosophy, since "the understanding remains inactive until set in motion by the passions" [31, P. 264].

7. The Functioning of the Aesthetic Attitude

Thus, the prevailing conception of the aesthetic attitude—according to which it is a "disinterested, sympathetic, and contemplative relation to any object, undertaken for its own sake" [32, P. 346]— can hardly be regarded as adequate to the actual state of affairs. For in this view, "we do not regard the object of our attention with any hidden purpose… There is no goal guiding our experience other than the goal of having the experience itself" [33, P. 35]. In reality, however, the *aesthetic attitude* is an *emotional evaluation of an object from the standpoint of its value for society*. As the realization of a particular social need, when positively satisfied it yields both enjoyment and pleasure to the individual. Depending on the object, it assumes different forms.

With respect to the material objects surrounding a person, a positive evaluation manifests itself in their perception as *beautiful*. Social practice forms in the individual's consciousness a certain ideal representation (with variations depending on personal experience) of an object or phenomenon in terms of its social significance. Objects or phenomena belonging to the same class may possess greater or lesser social value depending on their specific features. These particular features, perceived by the subject in the course of social practice, are subconsciously processed in a statistical manner, and on this basis an ideal image of the "average" object emerges—one that is most typical and most representative (in terms of its social significance) for that class. Even if not consciously recognized, this image may serve as a kind of *standard* for evaluating objects of that class. When evaluation is based on axiological information, the comparison between immediate perception and this foundational *aesthetic image* produces an *aesthetic judgment*.

The foundational aesthetic image is, in general, not the image of any specific, actually existing object. Being composed of characteristic elements inherent in various objects or phenomena of a *given class*, it is, in this sense, a complete abstraction. At the same time, it is individual in nature and may differ among people with *different aesthetic tastes*. The fact that such an "abstract" object is socially neutral does not imply its *uselessness* for society. On the contrary, it is precisely analogous (but real) objects that largely ensure its existence. These are simply perceived with indifference—yet indifference here is "not a neutral, non-evaluative relation, but rather a kind of 'latent' form of emotional evaluation" [34, P. 53]. It has long been held that "in order to experience aesthetic pleasure, one must first experience some kind of pleasure; there is nothing aesthetic in a state of indifference or apathy" [35, P. 20]. However, a person is indifferent not only to what lacks importance, but also "to essential, vitally significant phenomena that do not exceed the bounds of what we regard as normal… Only 'abnormal' phenomena—those that exceed or violate the norm—provoke an active emotional response."

The comparison between the foundational aesthetic image and the image resulting from immediate perception cannot be carried out through rational-logical thinking, since neither can be fully reproduced in the form of a *logical construct*. This comparison (the process of which remains unconscious) generates an *emotional* evaluation: it will be *positive* if the perceived object deviates toward greater social significance, and *negative* in the opposite case. As with judgments based on rational-logical information, an evaluation based on axiological information may or may not correspond to objective reality. Yet in most cases it ultimately aligns with *general social representations* and contributes to forming an *attitude* toward reality, thereby shaping the kind of activity required by society.

A natural question arises: what happens when a person encounters an object or phenomenon for the first time, such that their social practice could not have provided a notion of its socially neutral state? After all, "we know everything in the world only through comparison; and if a completely new object were presented to us—one that could not be compared to anything else (if such a thing were possible)—we would be unable to form any thought about it or say anything about it" [37, P. 332]. However, such objects or phenomena contain elements already familiar to us, and it is through these that we evaluate them, comparing them with known objects or phenomena. The aesthetic attitude extends associatively: from known properties to unknown objects, from a part to the whole. Aesthetically, "the entire object or phenomenon is evaluated on the basis of those qualities that have been cognized" [36, P. 251]. Particularly important here, due to their universality, are abstract characteristics such as symmetry or rhythm, whose role in aesthetic perception has long attracted attention.

This approach to the nature of the beautiful also explains the *disinterestedness* of the aesthetic attitude, as noted by most researchers—but specifically from the standpoint of the subject: "The aesthetic attitude is always disinterested only in the sense that, for example, I admire someone else's field without thinking that it does not belong to me, that the money earned from its harvest will not go into my own pocket; yet I cannot help but think: 'Thank God, what a splendid harvest there will be; how well the peasants will fare from this crop! My God, how much human happiness, how much joy is ripening in this field.' And it must be said that this thought—perhaps vague and not fully conscious—more than anything else disposes me toward aesthetic enjoyment of the field" [38, V. 2, P.155].

Since aesthetic evaluation is *social* in character, unlike purely personal emotions, it does not require immediate action. It simply shapes our attitude toward the world. In other words, at the moment of perception, "we do not regard the object of our attention with any hidden purpose; we do not attempt to use it practically or manipulate it immediately."

The beautiful, which evokes aesthetic pleasure, is the central aesthetic category; it reflects the very essence of the aesthetic attitude. However, as is well known, the aesthetic attitude is also expressed through other categories. The category complementary to the beautiful is the *ugly*. The ugly is usually mentioned alongside the beautiful as its

opposite, its antipode. It is "the beautiful in reverse," that is, an indicator of the deviation of the perceived object from the foundational aesthetic image in the direction of diminished social significance. Thus, the ugly is not necessarily something absolutely harmful. When we say that an object is ugly, we merely mean that, in our view, its significance for society is below the average, normal, or indifferent level—that is, relatively negative. Other aesthetic categories (such as the sublime, the tragic, the comic, etc.) may be regarded as derivative, arising from the interrelation of aesthetic evaluation with other forms of social relations, and they pertain more properly to the domain of art theory.

The foregoing concerns the aesthetic attitude toward material objects and phenomena encountered by the social individual. When it comes to the *human being* as an object of perception, however, the evaluation is dual in nature. When *another* person is perceived as a material—albeit special—*object*, the evaluation is connected with their biological and pragmatic characteristics (*physical beauty*) and is determined by prior social experience. Here, too, there is an associative interplay between physical and social qualities. However, the aesthetic evaluation of a person as a functioning member of society—as *a personality*—is expressed in the corresponding evaluation of their *activity* in that role (including their motives). Such evaluation is typically called *ethical* (or moral). As for human activity itself, it generally concerns ordinary functioning, though it may also be connected with the pursuit of positive social evaluation (for example, through *deliberate displays of one's virtues*).

Finally, this evaluation may be directed by a person toward *themselves*. In this case, it assumes an explicitly *ethical* character and directly influences behavior. Yet in the general structure of our relation to social phenomena and to the human being as their participant, we find no *fundamental difference* between aesthetic and moral evaluation. Indeed, moral evaluation is significantly influenced by aesthetic evaluation, since, as Joseph Brodsky famously put it, "aesthetics is the mother of ethics." Moral behavior (that which conforms to accepted norms) falls entirely under the *category of the beautiful*, whereas immoral behavior is evaluated as ugly. However, when social evaluation becomes *self-evaluation*, it takes the form of a specific feeling—the *moral feeling*. Here, we are dealing precisely with moral feelings, not moral norms. A moral principle formulated in general terms differs from moral feeling just as a general aesthetic principle differs from immediate aesthetic experience. We often judge whether someone's behavior conforms to moral norms, but such judgment is distinct from the feelings of pride or shame that the behavior evokes. These feelings are typically experienced by the individual themselves when critically assessing their own actions. Others are affected by them only insofar as we *identify* ourselves with them: for example, the immoral act of a stranger provokes indignation, whereas the same act by a friend or relative may evoke a sense of shame.

8. The Formation of the Aesthetic Attitude

The foregoing considerations concerning axiological information—on the basis of which an individual forms an emotional attitude toward various objects in general, and an aesthetic attitude in particular—apply to a given individual. However, as a component of social consciousness, such an attitude also possesses a *social* character, which presupposes the exchange of information among members of society. This exchange is driven by individuals' striving to transmit such information to others in order to influence the formation of their emotional attitudes toward the world—somewhat analogous to the transmission of semantic information between individuals. Yet, as already noted, due to the specificity of axiological information, its *direct* transmission from one subject to another is impossible. And yet the need for such transmission exists. Therefore, other mechanisms come into play.

These mechanisms, like many others, originated as early as the animal world. The formation of a unified social super-organism out of individual beings—one that organizes, as such, its own shared informational and material subsystems—was grounded in the evolution of corresponding mechanisms in our animal ancestors. In particular, within the animal brain, signals arriving from the external environment via the senses are processed in the form of images of objects in the external world. These are recoded into information—signals within the neural networks of the given animal's brain. As a result of processing this incoming information, on the one hand a *program of action* is formed, and on the other, a *command* is issued to execute it, transmitted to the effector organs.

In itself, this process concerns only the actions of a *given* animal and is not directly connected with other animals of the same species, each possessing an analogous mechanism. Thus, "animals do not possess language in the true sense of the word. … All sounds and bodily movements of animals express only their emotional state and do not depend on whether another being of the same species is nearby." Due to the similarity of sources of axiological information among members of the same species, "there also exist innate modes of response to these signals, and the response occurs whenever the animal sees or hears another member of its species" [39, P. 88, 89].

In other words, there is *no purposeful transmission* of signals (that is, of *information* in the strict sense) between individual animals, but there is *mutual influence*. Here, however, the emotional response is directed not toward some special signals as such, but toward the behavior of another animal, itself *generated by that animal's emotions*. In this case, the response is not to *externally* transmitted information, but only to "certain behavioral acts that one or several individuals elicit in others of the same kind" [40, P.144]. These acts become *not transmitters* but *sources* of axiological information that influence the behavior of another individual, including, in particular, the emergence of herd behavior.

In human society, a decisive role is played by the specifically human capacity for the *purposeful* transmission of information between individuals, which makes possible the formation of a shared *social* consciousness reflecting the needs of the entire society. However, this applies only to semantic information, which presupposes its *sign-based* character. *Emotional behavior*—eliciting corresponding emotions in others—has not only been preserved but further developed, in particular taking the form of a *conscious striving* to influence the emotional state of another person. This applies to all human emotions. Yet whereas emotions "in general" are directed toward stimulating a more or less specific response in the addressee, aesthetic emotions, as social emotions, are directed not so much toward immediate

reaction as toward the formation of *a general attitude toward life*. *In transmitting* semantic information, each individual simultaneously strives to shape in others a corresponding emotional attitude toward it. Those who achieve a certain success in this domain tend—often subconsciously—to regard it as a personal accomplishment, thereby enhancing their social status, including in their own self-perception, and consequently deriving a particular kind of satisfaction.

This applies even more strongly to the aesthetic attitude. As argued above, the aesthetic attitude is bound up with the satisfaction of social needs, which primarily concern the *relations* of each individual with others. For this reason, among all the objects surrounding a person, the most important is *another human being*. In the words of Protagoras, "man is the measure of all things," even when what is at issue is merely the embodiment of certain human qualities in other objects. For example, in sports, what appears to interest spectators most is the achieved result. Yet what they admire is not the *abstract* result as such, but the *concrete* athlete who attained it through specific *personal* qualities. An athlete lifts a weight that no one has lifted before. So what? An elephant could lift more—not to mention a overhead crane. But it was a particular human being who achieved this result. If the athlete trained to achieve it, improving himself in the process—he deserves honor and praise. But if he achieved the same result by indirect means (for example, by using stimulants)—that is a disgrace. This applies to any human activity, but especially to those forms specifically aimed at shaping others' attitudes toward life.

Typically, this activity is organically embedded in human interaction: *not only the transmission* of semantic information, but also the *formation* of axiological information. The primary medium for this is ordinary language. The techniques employed are extremely diverse and largely characterize the individual who uses them. Language itself possesses vast capacities not only to convey semantic information, but also to evoke emotions that reinforce its credibility—and thus its persuasiveness. Figurative speech, expressive gestures, and similar means serve this purpose as well. The achieved effect appears to elevate the social status of the speaker. In some cases, however, such techniques are used deliberately for this purpose, especially in close interpersonal contexts, employing both semantic and axiological information.

When this concerns not specific issues but assumes a generalized character, the influence becomes intentionally aesthetic. When a person dances at a celebration, joins in singing at a gathering, or tells a joke to friends, they are driven not so much by a specific practical aim as by a largely unconscious desire to cultivate—both in themselves and in others—a positive general attitude toward life through aesthetic means, by giving others aesthetic pleasure. The creation of corresponding "*artistic objects*" brings them similar pleasure as well. This sphere of activity—purposeful creation of artistic objects—*has come to be called art*.

Over time, a clearly defined and specific product of this activity emerges: the *work of art*. Through it, both the creator's need for *social self-affirmation* and the perceiver's need for the *beautiful* are satisfied. This continued for millennia. Several thousand years ago, however, with the emergence of *the social division of labor*, this activity gradually *separated into a distinct domain of social practice*. As John Dewey rightly observed, "when artistic objects are separated from the conditions of their origin and from their operation in experience, a wall is built around them that almost completely obscures their general significance, which is the concern of aesthetic theory. Art is relegated to a separate realm, where it is cut off from connections with the materials and aims of any other human undertaking, work, or achievement" [41, P. 4]. The activity mentioned above—essentially artistic creativity—thus became a more or less distinct occupation, even a profession, providing a livelihood by affording aesthetic pleasure to others. In other words, it became a specific domain of social activity—*artistic creation*—fulfilling a particular function in the organization of social life.

This function consists in shaping a generalized human attitude toward reality. Thus, Leo Tolstoy saw the principal social purpose (and role) of art in the *formation* of such an *attitude* toward various phenomena of social life that, regardless of *considerations* of personal or social utility, would evoke a *motivation* for activity leading, according to prevailing views, to the most beneficial outcomes for society. And since, as noted above, one cannot transmit one's feelings to others in the same way one transmits information, they must be formed anew. Tolstoy therefore emphasizes the special role of art in this process: "Everything that now, independently of fear of violence and punishment, makes collective human life possible (and in our time a vast portion of social order rests precisely on this) has been accomplished by art … and is maintained by generations of millions of people not only without the slightest coercion, but in such a way that nothing can unsettle it except art" [42, V. 30, P. 113]. This is achieved *through works of art by those who create them*—and in this process they find the aim and meaning of their lives.

9. The Beautiful in Art

Thus, for a certain category of individuals, the striving to exert an aesthetic influence on others acquires a constant and profoundly significant character. It is expressed in the creation of special material objects deliberately designed to produce an aesthetic effect on other people. In this way, alongside the objects of aesthetic attitude discussed above—bearers of the beautiful—there appears, as it were, another kind of object, distinguished by a certain specificity: *the work of art*.

As a human creation, produced by a person acting here as *a creator* of the beautiful (an artist), it is a priori oriented toward a positive aesthetic evaluation. That is, for the work of art, the beautiful appears as an *attributive property*. Through their creation, the artist addresses those who will perceive it (the audience) with a kind of special message in a special "language," seeking to influence, to the extent possible, their attitude toward the world. This is precisely the purpose for which it is created. On a related point, G. W. F. Hegel wrote that a work of art "does not exist *for itself* but *for us*, for a public that contemplates and enjoys it… Every work of art constitutes a kind of dialogue with each person who stands before it" [43, P. 270]. The artist creates not for themselves but as a message to others, even if they may sometimes believe otherwise: "The assertion that art is possible for itself alone is an unnatural falsehood" [42, V. 13, P. 276].

Nevertheless, despite its undoubtedly communicative social role, art *does not constitute* a specific "language." It does

not, because—contrary to the claims of semioticians—it *does not* in fact possess a determinate "vocabulary" of "signs," nor "definite rules" governing their combination. It is incorrect to claim that a work of art employs a "language—some definite, shared abstract system that makes communication possible." Equally mistaken is the assertion that "the language of a work" exists as a given prior to the creation of a concrete text [44]. This is incorrect because what is at issue here is axiological information, which *does not have* its own fixed "vocabulary" forming an "abstract sign system," *nor a pre-existing* semantics in the sense of determinate combinatorial rules prior to the work itself.

What, then, are the features that make a work of art *an effective means of aesthetic influence* (that is, an object of beauty)? Clearly, any work of art *is a real object* (a phenomenon or a thing*), distinguished from others by its material structure*. It is therefore understandable that one might attempt to locate its properties, including its aesthetic properties, in the features of this material structure. Indeed, an entire field of intellectual inquiry—art history and art theory—has been devoted to this task. The relevant characteristics of artworks across various forms and genres have been repeatedly and meticulously studied. The empirically identified "laws" governing the selection and combination of their elements are often taken to be *laws of the beautiful in art*.

From this perspective, art historians, who have for centuries carefully analyzed works of art, have identified a multitude of "poetic objects" (as Leo Tolstoy ironically remarked, "poetic, in general, are all those objects most frequently used by artists in their works" [42, V. 30, P. 113]) and "rules" for combining them in the construction of artworks. Yet they have failed to establish any *objective laws*—even highly complex ones—by which artistic masterpieces could be produced. This *practical sterility* of art theory, in what would seem to be its central aim, has given rise in some of its practitioners to a latent inferiority complex. It manifests itself in the excessive pride of those who claim membership in an elite of the "initiated," privy to this "mystery": "Professionals know that aesthetics… is an extremely elitist discipline or intellectual practice… accessible in its foundations to very few… the study of aesthetics as a science belongs to a sphere reserved for especially gifted individuals… through the analysis of contemporary art and advanced intellectual movements in the humanities" [45, P. 4-9].

However, even the most scrupulous adherence to the supposedly discovered "laws" of art yields nothing more than craftsmanship. In practice, violations of these alleged laws in different cultural contexts have often not hindered—and sometimes have even facilitated—the creation of great works of art. This is because such works primarily present their creator—a *human being*. Of course, the artist's professional mastery is important, since one can express oneself only by sufficiently mastering the "material" of the future artwork. But this, too, is relative. As Benedetto Croce aptly observed: "There are historians who, for example, seek to see the childhood of Italian art in Giotto and its maturity in Raphael or Titian—as if Giotto were not complete and perfect with respect to the emotional material he bore within himself. Certainly, he could not depict the body as Raphael did, nor apply color as Titian did; but could Raphael or Titian have created 'The Marriage of St. Francis with Poverty' or 'The Death of St. Francis'? Giotto's spirit was not yet drawn to that flourishing state of the body which the Renaissance later made the object of its attention" [46, P. 155].

Far more important is *whether the artist has something to express*—whether they possess the requisite *creative potential*. If not, no degree of mastery will suffice. If they do, then self-taught artists may suddenly emerge—a customs officer like Henri Rousseau, a small shopkeeper like Niko Pirosmani, or a peasant woman like Maria Prymachenko—and, disregarding all the canons and laws proclaimed by art theorists, create masterpieces. Or a very young Consuelo Velázquez may suddenly compose one of the most popular songs in the world, *"Bésame Mucho."* What is at stake here is the *expression of the human person as a creator of values*—not relative values tied to particular practical concerns, but "absolute ones in their immanent quality, insofar as their realization depends on the creative power of the individual" [47, P. 24]. It is precisely this that distinguishes a work of art from any other material object. Accordingly, the true aim of the artist is not the reproduction, in one form or another, of an *image of some object*, but the *re-creation in others* of their own *aesthetic attitude toward it*.

Otherwise, why would a master draftsman like Pablo Picasso, at a certain stage in his career, abandon precise external resemblance in favor of radical deformation? At that stage, he no longer sought *to reproduce the model* as accurately as possible, but *to evoke in the viewer a corresponding emotional (aesthetic) response*. And when he succeeded, his work was perceived as a great work of art. An artist—if they truly deserve the name—is inwardly concerned with the interests of society as they understand them. They wish for it to become better. They believe, in the words of Fyodor Dostoevsky, that "beauty will save the world," and they strive, as best they can, to bring beauty into the world through their creative work. The artist themselves (as do their viewers) may regard the artwork *as a kind of reflection of the world*; in reality, however, it is *an agent for shaping one's attitude toward the world*—through the projection of the artist's personality. It is the personality of the human being, reflected in the work through its distinctive qualities, that grants it this status. Thus, *the beautiful in art* is *not an immanent property of the material object as such*, *but the personality of the artist reflected in it*.

In *Art as Experience*, John Dewey writes: "Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that an object finely wrought, whose structure and proportions are pleasing in perception, is taken to be the product of some primitive people. But then evidence appears that it is a random natural product. As an external thing it remains exactly what it was before. Yet it at once ceases to be a work of art and becomes a natural 'curiosity.' It is now in a natural history museum rather than in an art museum. And it should be noted that the distinction is not made by the intellect; it is made directly in the course of evaluative perception" [48, P. 49].

Accordingly, *it is the human being—the artist as a personality*—who is the true *aesthetic object in art*. After all, no normal person would shed tears over the sufferings portrayed by an actor on screen, fully aware that it is "make-believe." The "consumer of art" empathizes in earnest only *with the author* (or authors) of the artistic image, and *through it participates in their genuine emotions*, under whose influence the work was created. Thus, a work of art is perceived as an aesthetic object—as something beautiful—*only on the condition* that it *is intentionally* designed *to*

represent the human creator. The more successfully the artist accomplishes this, the more beautiful the work appears to the audience.

This is why originals are valued so highly. Museums contain many forgeries taken to be authentic works of great masters, since even the most knowledgeable experts cannot always distinguish them. Yet if their true nature becomes known, the painting—*unchanged in the slightest*—immediately *loses its artistic status*.

10. The Artist and the Public

And yet, "art is one of the means by which people communicate with one another." As we have sought to demonstrate, "every work of art results in the perceiver entering into a certain kind of communion with those who produced or are producing the art, and with all those who simultaneously with him, before him, or after him have perceived or will perceive the same artistic impression" [42, V. 30, P.63-64]. However, in art, the artistic "message" does *not arise within the text itself*, but rather in the *interaction* between the artist (*through* the work of art) and its recipients (the public). Neither the attempt to locate the source of a work's aesthetic properties in its internal structure, nor the application to works of art of aesthetic criteria used for *other* material objects (such as their social utility), yields satisfactory results.

This last point is particularly important. Indeed, if an object of perception evokes aesthetic impressions (that is, if it is *beautiful*) by virtue of an *already* inherent *social value*, then *as a material object*—independent of its perception—*a work of art possesses no special value for society*. It becomes valuable *not prior to*, but *as a result of*, the disclosure of its socially significant qualities, which must exist in it before its perception, not the other way around. Prior to that moment, *it has interacted only with its creator.* Therefore, we shift our focus from the work of art *itself* to its *creator*—the subject of artistic activity, the artist.

As noted earlier, the desire to influence the feelings of others is by no means unique to the artist. Nevertheless, in modern society there exists an "exceptional concentration of artistic talent in particular individuals, and a corresponding suppression of it in the broader mass," which is "a consequence of the division of labor." The development of talent "depends entirely on demand, which in turn depends on the division of labor" [21, V. 3, P. 392]. In a socially structured society, the individual who assumes the role of artist occupies a special position. His activity, in this capacity, is specifically directed toward *shaping* in others a certain attitude toward life. To this end, the artist *creates a work of art* that *does not transmit* feelings directly, but rather *evokes* them in others.

Thus, a painter depicting objects on canvas does not primarily aim to convey accurate information about those objects, but rather *to evoke* in the viewer the emotions that he himself experiences. Typically, the artist employs *images*; yet even when using *signs*, he combines them *not according to pre-established rules*, but in accordance with *his intuitive representations*. In doing so, he effectively creates not merely a message (or not only a message) about an object, but *a new complex object* (more precisely, its *image*) that did not previously exist. He *does this not by copying reality*, but by *shaping* in the "consumer" of art *a desired representation* of a similar object—more precisely, *a corresponding emotional attitude toward it*.

It is unlikely, for example, that Alexei Savrasov, in his painting *The Rooks Have Come Back*, set as his primary goal the production of a "photographic" depiction of an early spring landscape with these birds—although that is precisely what he portrayed. More likely, he *intuitively counted on evoking in the viewer sensations akin to his own*: a gentle sadness for years gone by, a tentative hope for the future, a tender response to nature's renewal, and much else—often unarticulated, subconscious, and fleeting, yet together generating a luminous sense of unity with the world. This occurs through *associations* elicited by the image. Elicited, because, as we emphasize once again, such feelings cannot in principle be transmitted directly. Associations tied to semantic information are relatively bounded; in contrast, for *axiological information* in a work of art, *such associations are in principle limitless*—though *guided by the artist*.

Whether consciously or not, when presenting a work of art to the public (viewers, readers, listeners), the artist is in fact *presenting himself as a personality*. Leo Tolstoy quite rightly observed: "In everything I wrote, I was guided by the need to gather thoughts linked together in order to express myself." At the same time, he just as rightly criticized the "absurdity of seeking isolated (!) thoughts in a work of art … in that innumerable labyrinth of connections in which the essence (!) of art consists, and according to those laws (!) which underlie these connections" [42, V. 62, P. 270].

Yet the *viewer* (reader, listener), in his perception, attributes the merit of the resulting impression directly to the work of art *itself* (for example, to the aforementioned painting), although *the aesthetic emotions are evoked not by the canvas as such, but by the particular qualities of its creator reflected through it*—qualities that enable such a powerful effect through the elements of depiction and their interrelations. In this way, the artist expresses himself in that specific work as a person worthy of the viewer's empathy. This applies to other arts as well. For instance, "the architectural work, the Greek temple, represents nothing. It simply stands in the valley… Standing there, it first gives things their look and grants to human beings their first view of themselves… and sets before them what is sacred and what is profane" [49]. This, in fact, was the aim—perhaps even an unconscious one—of its creator, who expressed himself in his creation and thereby evoked a corresponding impression.

However, for such a connection between artist and public to arise, they must share analogous informational thesauri. For "one who speaks in a language intelligible only to himself does not speak at all" [50, P. 63]. Of course, as repeatedly emphasized, aesthetic (axiological) information cannot, by its very nature, be grounded in a fixed vocabulary and syntax (a finite system of signs with predetermined meanings and rules of combination). Therefore, the informational unity of artist and public is ensured by *their shared social practice*, including in the sphere of art. Karl Marx expressed this as follows: "If you want *to enjoy art*, you *must be an artistically educated person*" [21, V. 42, P. 94], since "the object of art—like any other product—creates a public that understands art and is capable of enjoying beauty."

Thus, *two informational flows* intersect in a work of art: one from the artist, who seeks *to influence* the public through it, and another from the public (readers, viewers, listeners), who, based on their own "artistic experience" and general

outlook, *introduce their own "corrections"* into their perception of the work. The scope and character of the first are determined by the artist, and of the second by the social context. A well-known extreme case is the near reduction of the first to zero, where the impression is almost entirely generated by the second. This is the phenomenon of the so-called "Black Square." The founder of Suprematism, Kazimir Malevich, exhibited a canvas almost entirely occupied by a black square. The painting contains *nothing* that could inherently generate aesthetic perception and effectively carries no axiological information. Its entire "aesthetic" quality lies in its association with a provocative author. This proved sufficient for the public; the rest was supplied by the viewers' imagination. Malevich himself regarded the work highly, considering it the best he had ever created. Through this bold gesture, he achieved considerable fame, and the "work" became not only symbolically "valuable," but also materially expensive—one of its "author's replicas" was even sold for a million dollars. "Thus, the 'Black Square' became a kind of unit for measuring financial success" [51, P. 26] It also provided art critics with ample material for elaborate interpretations.

11. Conclusion

To summarize: over many centuries, aesthetics has failed to definitively determine its subject—whether it is the *aesthetic relation* of human beings to surrounding material objects, or, in other words, the problem of beauty. In our view, the primary reason for this lies in the persistent focus on the *structure* of objects, which has not led to the discovery of any specifically "aesthetic" elements or properties. Nor does shifting attention to the individual's *relation* to the object resolve the issue: the principle of the "disinterestedness" of aesthetic experience remains intact.

We argue that the solution requires treating the aesthetic as *a social phenomenon*. The perceiving subject must be understood not as an isolated individual, but as a representative of society. This entails a different approach—namely, clarifying the role of the aesthetic *in the functioning of society as a unified organism*, within which the aesthetic attitudes of individuals toward reality play a crucial role.

These aspects are intricately interconnected. Society, as a holistic system, sustains itself only through the actions of its constituent individuals. Yet those individuals are themselves organisms that must secure their own survival. All human actions are driven by needs. Actions aimed at satisfying personal needs—shared with higher animals—are governed by biological needs. However, to sustain society as a whole, individuals have also developed *social needs*, which concern *their interaction with others*.

We have examined these social needs and argued that the aesthetic need—the need for the beautiful—plays a crucial role *in forming a shared, socially beneficial attitude toward life*. This is particularly important in stratified societies, where social groups have divergent interests. As has been noted, "when conditions prevent production from becoming a lived and fully realized experience, the product will lack aesthetic quality. No matter how useful it may be for particular purposes, it will not contribute to the enrichment of life" [52, P. 19] in the fullest sense. In other words, aesthetic experience does not reflect pragmatic needs ("disinterestedness"), but serves *to expand and enrich life*—that is, it pertains to a broader *social valuation*. Only then does evaluation become aesthetic: what is beneficial for *society* is experienced by the *individual* as something pleasurable and harmonious.

This gave rise to the aspiration of certain individuals to shape the aesthetic attitudes of others through works of art. The division of originally egalitarian societies into groups with differing interests emerged as a consequence of scientific and technological progress, whose results could no longer be fully mastered by each individual. The resolution of this contradiction took the form of the social division of labor—first technological specialization, then broader social differentiation between those who govern and those who execute. While this increased productivity, it also laid the foundation for social inequality.

For the past 10–12 thousand years, human history has largely been the history of evolving forms of labor division [53]. Today, however, scientific and technological progress—particularly the development of artificial intelligence—points toward the gradual transfer of routine functions to machines. As a result, the social division of labor may disappear, along with social stratification. *Humanity could become a unified egalitarian organism*.

In such a society, relations would be governed neither by coercion, nor by laws, nor even by moral norms. The primary role would be played by *aesthetic relations*. Maxim Gorky expressed this idea succinctly: "Aesthetics is the ethics of the future." As an artist, he believed in the organic unity of the moral and the beautiful. If externally imposed moral norms disappear along with stratification, human behavior may instead be guided by *an internal need for harmony and beauty*.

Art itself would also undergo profound transformation. The abolition of the division of labor—combined with unprecedented *technological possibilities* for creativity and communication—would lead not only to the *mass* participation in artistic activity, but to the flourishing of new forms, including collective ones that we can scarcely imagine today. *Everyone will be an artist—and no one in particular*. For in a free society, "there are no painters as such; there are only people who engage in painting among other activities" [21, V. 3, P. 393]. The same applies to all forms of art. And art will play a decisive role in creating a universal aesthetic atmosphere—*the very medium of life for future generations*.

12. References

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