

On the techno – Aesthetic

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Dear Comrade

I received, yesterday your circular from the 18th of May. I am in perfect agreement the project to create an international college of philosophy. It could legitimately inherit the remainder of credits from the "Institut International de Philosophie (Gaston Berger, and Matial Gueroult). Being consulted as one of the last members of this institute, I was denied this six or seven years ago.

At its base, if one must regenerate contemporary philosophy, one must think by privileging interfaces, and above all to not exclude: I don't see, in particular, any mention of thought or practice of religion. Why?

We must also call for the thinking and realizations, whether reflective thought or not, of aesthetics. Why not think of the foundation of beauty? Why not think of the foundation and perhaps of an axiomatizationⁱ

provisionary of an aesthetic technique or a techno aesthetic? In Eupalinos, Valéry states: “ there where one passes we see only an elegant chapel, I find the exact proportions of a Corinthian girl that I happily loved.”

Marinetti’s futurism made a place for a racing automobile. And Fernand Leger: the “red tractor”, the workers. And the Centre Pompidou. Le Corbusier, with his sense of the unachieved: a politeness towards materials: we do not parge. The traces left by the formwork on the concrete of the chimney of the Dominican convent in Arbresle near Lyon are intentionally visible, especially in the morning and in the evening, the illuminated mathematically calculated and proportioned glazing of the monk’s corridor. Le Corbusier used a concrete parging in each of the loggia’s cells. But this is more than a troweled parging, in whose entelechyⁱⁱ is an opaquely smooth surface. It consists of a projection produced by a concrete canon, covering the walls with a granularity on which light can play. Art and Nature can interfere: at Firminy – le Vert, near St. Etienne,

Le Corbusier's building is built on columns, that allow the horizon to appear without the opaque building, which is more than a wall. At Chandigar, I don't know. At the Cité Radieuse in Marseille neither. The chapel at Notre – Dame du Haut at Ronchamp is not built on columns, however the roof in the form of a wing, or of a sail ornaments the landscape and is ornamented by it. This is the symbol of nature. If we return to the Dominican convent at Arbresle, we find in the profile corridors of inverted "T"s, quite rectilinear, bursting with the colours of industrial codes applied to tubes and cables. This is what others are forced to hide behind woodwork or in broom closets, in the corners of rooms falsely paneled (the amphitheatre of the Sorbonne). Le Corbusier manifests it in a élanⁱⁱⁱ of phanerotechnique^{iv}.

The phanerotechnique is already by itself aesthetic: The Eiffel Tower, (the exposition tower) and the viaduc at Garabit sur la Truyere have an undeniable aesthetic force. At its origins, the Eiffel tower

had hardly any functions to justify its erection other than an elevated belvedere. However it soon became the best broadcasting tower in France. It is still so and even more and more: the television aeriels surmount the last floor and grow it even more.

Garabit, sur la Truyere, maybe, is even more marvelous, by its inverted catenary form of its principal arch, and by its anchorage in rocks of its foundations. As well because it is plain nature. It traverses nature and nature traverses it. And as well it is even more perhaps by the conditions of its construction, firstly two parallel semi bridges are applied between two hills, then the day of their junction, if there were any wind, it could become a catastrophe. " But there will be no wind" claimed Eiffel. And, in effect, there was no wind. The two semi bridges turned 90° slowly and simultaneously under the guidance of cables. They came together, their extremities, one against the other, and were locked. And since that time, the viaduct exists in its unity, in its simple perfection. This is certainly a work of techno - aesthetic, perfectly functional, perfectly completed, and beautiful simultaneously: technique is aesthetic, aesthetic because of the technical, technical because of the aesthetic.

There is

intercategorical fusion.

This meditation oriented towards a discovery of an intercategorical axiology, may be expanded by the contemplation of the handling of tools. Let's compare an adjustable plier from Peugeot France to a circular cutting shear by Facom from the bird's beak model. The one and the other tools are red – not exactly the same red – they are about the same size and equally have handles lightly arced at the end to permit a better handling. However the Facom shears have something more than simple functionality. It is resplendent, and when we use it, there is an impression of ease that is not far from a sensori – motor pleasure.

There exists some cases where the techno – aesthetic can leave a standard, or more exactly, of the analog of a conflict of duties: a cyclist needs staged keys, approximately 8mm to 20mm. Because of the weight, he can only carry 8 keys, of the pipe or plate models. But there exists precisely a model of key unique at 8 different diameters: it is made with two perforated heads each with four hexagonal holes; the two heads are connected by a rectangular bar of longitudinal veins increasing the resistance to torsion. The tool measures 10 to 12 cm in length: it is held perfectly in a sack.

What is remarkable, is that the existence of the two heads permits an easy handling . The unused head is like a handle, contracted and resistant. The ensemble is a very beautiful object, that weights about one hundred grams. This tool responds well to its specifications. Made of bronze, it gives an aesthetic pleasure to be contemplated. But the techno – aesthetic does not have contemplation as its principle category. It is in its usage, in action, that it becomes in a way, orgasmic, tactile means and motor stimulation. When a seized nut is freed, we are testing a motor pleasure, a certain instrumentalized joy, a communication, mediated by the tool, with the object on which we operate. As with forging, at every strike of the hammer, we test the state of forged metal that stretches and deforms between the hammer and anvil. The same goes with a draw knife, a hand plane. The operation serves a shaving that rises and rolls. The bite of a file, the grip of a wood rasp with very neat teeth, it's a joy for the hands and the forearms, a pleasure of action. The axe as well, or the adze gives a very particular sensation of satisfaction to a dynamic regimen. This is a type of perceptive – motor and sensorial intuition.

The body gives and receives. Even a machine, such as a lathe or a milling machine, demonstrates this particular sensation. There exists an entire sensorial range for all types of tools. A tool as rare as a molding channel has itself a range of the sensorial. We could continue as such in an unlimited way, while passing in a discontinuous way to the actual artistic instruments that are used: the fingering of a piano, the vibration and the tension of the strings of a harp – pinched – sour bites of strings of the Hurdy Gurdy on the cylinder coated with rosin, its all a register quasi inexhaustible. Art is not only an object of contemplation, but a particular form of action which is a bit like the practice of a sport for those that use it. A painter feels the viscosity of the paint that he mixes on the palette or spreads on the canvas; this paint is more or less unctuous and the vibratory tactile sensibility plays a role for the actor as an artist. Particularly when the brush or the knife is put into contact with the canvas, stretched on the frame and elastic. For water colour it is another sensation, that of an application more or less instantaneous of a brush, sparingly melting the transparency of all. For music, the weight of a piano's mute, the kinetic energy of the game that determines, by horizontal displacement, the pedal "piano" and the other displacement of the felt chokes in which distance allows the strings to vibrate

and mix the sounds through free vibration, slowly decreasing, the struck cords. The aesthetic, is not only nor firstly the sensation of a consumer of a work of art. It is also, more originally again, the sensorial set, more or less rich, of the artist himself: a certain contact with the material in process of becoming a work. We experience an aesthetic affection by making a weld, by inserting a corkscrew.

It is a continuous spectrum that relates the aesthetic to the technical. A simple zinc coated bolt presents iridescences and nuances that makes one think of fluoridated objectives: colors of a pigeon's throat, gleaming colored. There is an contemplable aesthetic in the cabling of a radar. No objects leaves the aesthetic need indifferent. It is perhaps untrue that all aesthetic objects have a technical value, but all technical objects under a certain condition have an aesthetic content. Let's take for example the E V12 jaguar automobile. Functionality is not its strength. This enormous only corresponds to the transport of two people. Behind the seats there is only place for a dog. Without a doubt this concept is only meant for a strictly monogamous - childless couple, with the couple for the builder. The body, seen at its level, is audacious, and functionally well shaped for a weak trail of air. But the underside is

much less satisfying. It is comprised of ribs that are hardly aerodynamic. The character of the convertible model makes it even less functional. Even when the roof is put in its place and well secured, there remains transversal ribs that oppose the creation of resistance to the flow of air currents. When the vehicle is roofless the air turbulence is even higher. The windshield is at this moment a veritable spoiler at high speeds (Maximum at around 250 km per hour). This spoiler is comparable to a plane's aero brake. On planes, it permits the moderation of the speed of descent to approach runways in the best conditions of security. On a vehicle, we can also exploit air resistance to keep the rear wheels to the ground: Matra uses then the rear of the vehicle, which is not horizontal, but raised at a 30 to 40 degree angle in relation to the horizontal. The result refractable in relation to aesthetic standards? The Matra vehicle appears a bit like a monster; It give the impression of an organism recently emergent from the larval phase, and one which is not entirely developed, drawn by the sun – like a butterfly that has attained the inoginal phase, but has not dried its wings yet and remains on a tree branch – a mutant as well to its proper techno – aesthetic. Some of its organs are hypertelic, others hypothetical and atrophied. He is from the start marginalized for his original associative group, In time he will

establish a group distinct from his original group and other adjacent groups.

Some aesthetic objects call for a technical analysis. The Mona Lisa has provoked passions and has generally caused enthusiasm. It is perhaps because this painting is plural at its foundation: It exists as a superimposition with respect to itself, a little like an exhaustive resume in so called exact sciences. There is on the same unique canvas, the beginning of a smile and the end of a smile, but not the full smile, the entelechy of a smile. It is only the two extreme terms of the smile that are painted and revealed. But the complete chain of the smile, is the contemplator that brings and constitutes an proper interiority and individual to a personality. The inchoative^v smile and the smile completing to return to the face's serious mask are the extreme terms of this temporal thickness: the smile will deploy and however the smile will already disappear. All that exists and is materialized is the beacon of an instant flourishing, of the full realization. But entelechy is not an appearance. Nor will it be in this unique image of two superimposed techniques, as in palimpsests, with two messages to decode, to infer the message – source, what is absent? This is the original reality that remains mute, not present but passed and to arrive in a quasi immediate manner and however mysterious. What is central, the fundamental message

is the mystery itself of the non appearance.

In another primitive sense, more completely bodily, the techno – aesthetic intervenes in the conditioning (in the commercial sense of the term) the ??? and the objects.

There is in India, at Mysore, a “food research institute”. This organization is charged with finding a formula for a “basic food” that could be produced at a low cost, in large quantities and rapidly transported in a reduced volume, to various locations where famine appears. The formula is basic, it is based on soya flour. But the base aesthetic intervenes once we regard the question of its best conditioning, of the best possible presentation of “basic food”, in order for it to be accepted by the diverse populations and different alimentary customs easily. In India there are populations that consume wheat, others rice..... These populations accept basic food on condition that it appears under the perceptive aspect accept by the local culture and provokes *ἄισθησις* (aisthisis) at its core. To respond to this perceptive exigency, the institute constitutes the basic food sometimes in the form of a grain of wheat, sometimes in the form of a grain of rice etc....

A French industrialist travelling in India saw a Belgian truck that distributed rice

The famine was indeed real. However, few inhabitants set out with a rice ration. The industrialist approached and asked: "How much do you sell this for?". The Belgian responded " I'm GIVING it away." . The reason for the lack of success was that the truck was in a region where the base nutrition was wheat. αισθησις , a fundamental perceptual intuition, is part of a culture. It acts as a preselector, that discerns the acceptable from the unacceptable, and determines the action as to whether it is accepted or refused.

We will not insist, because this has already explored or is being explored, on the force and importance of the conditioning of a product, that is to say its packaging, its presentation. But it must be declared, like an example of techno – aesthetic, the value of a presentation, for example, fabrics or costumes, with the curious and quite polymorph technical instrument that is the mannequin. The art of the window dresser consists of knowing and using this outline between artificial human that is the mannequin to drape the fabric, by cutting as little fabric as possible. It acts as much as a technique as an art.

In this purely zetetic development, we have neglected – because this is not as new – the industrial aesthetic. And yet again it is not the functionality that is the only standard.

But we must go deeper. The industrial aesthetic can firstly be that of the produced objects. But all

is not the object. Electricity is not an object. It is only detectable and manipulability between objects, and eventually, before, through natural materials: A bolt of lightning reinforces itself as it passes through previously ionized air corridors. There exists a preparatory time for the lightning bolt, prior to the striking discharge. This ionization can be heard with an antenna, for it is strewn of minimal discharges and initiating preconditions. The lightning properly struck is only a brutal conclusion, of high energy, a conclusion of the plural melody of the preparatory discharges. The final lightning bolt follows the trails already constructed. And this melody is progressively amplified by tracing the paths of weak resistance that collect each and every one until the moment of the final strike. The aesthetic of nature can only be perceived through a technical object (here an aperiodic receiver) when it consists of detecting the subtle phenomenon escaping the determinant but inequitable perception. Electricity is not an object, but it can become a source of *αισθησις* when it is mediated by an adequate instrument and arrives thus at the sensory organs. It is the same way with a galvanometer or an oscilloscope, which are both mediators. The hearing of the sequential melody is made possible by an industrial technical object partially diverted from its function. For there exists around every product a margin of liberty the permits its use to non determined ends. Inversly the aesthetic sensibility

can be used to develop a machine. To equalize, to balance the tension of the elastic part of a catapult, the Romans of antiquity made it vibrate like the strings of harp until unison was realized.

But the veritable industrial aesthetic is before all that of the place of production and emission. Take for example the plains of Villebon south west of Paris.

The Villebon plains are constituted, structured in its east extremity by a field of broadcast antennas. The highest is that of France – Culture. Its height had been reduced by 80m to 40m due to the passage of planes landing at Orly. It does, however, preserve a certain majesty. We find as well the antenna of the broadcaster Paris – IV – Villebon, that serves to diffuse Radio Sorbonne. And many others as well. This field of antennas, it is evident that each antenna in itself – even for itself -, above all. These are pylons that are generally stayed many times, the stays being divided in several segments by insulators to diminish the effect the phenomenon of resonance that would absorb a part of the radiation. And the pylon structure – stays that are very remarkable, especially because they are not found in nature. It is completely artificial, except perhaps if we think of the (fig trees) that take several support points and subsistence from the soil, thanks to the roots that emit towards the base of the sections, right until the soil where they enforce themselves and what permits the support of the branches

Before arriving at the techno aesthetic of an assembly one must consider that of the individual, for example that of a motor. The motor of an original 2 cv (deux chevaux) represents a reality that is not without an analog with that of the Jaguar. The 2cv is that of a 0 degree vehicle, where everything is simply accessible, providing that we remove the drive assembly, the air refrigeration for the cylinders. This motor even possesses a radiator – an oil chiller with two tubes that rise all the way to the superior cylinder head, with the goal of chilling the rocker arm. Contrary to this, the Jaguar's motor is extremely long. It stretches underneath a shallow hood, at which point the water reserve from the chilling circuit no longer belongs to the superior part of the ventilator, in order to not be constrained by its height, this would disturb the carefully profile form of the hood; of minimum heights towards the front. This large radiator becomes even more efficient by the presence of two electric fans, that start once the contact key is turned. The belts driven by the crankshaft would have been excessively long and awkward. The techno – aesthetic aspect of the motor is particularly underlined by the form of three organs: firstly the air intakes and air filters, parallel to the road, and flanking the motor through two long, brilliant spindles; then, the four carburetors in which the caps are in the form of a dome, and which dominate the motor block. Finally the enormous distributor from which fan out twelve cables leading towards the spark plugs.

If we are (examining) a motor, it is not because it is alone in possessing a certain level of individuation but that it is, with respect to itself, consistent and coherent; from this point of view, the entire automobile would be a type of composition under most of the pathological conditions – (an accident could deform the body without the motor suffering in any way, and as well, the motor could cease to function without the body being affected). The jaguar’s motor is the highest degree, actually, of gas motors for automobiles equipped to drive.

The techno-aesthetic can present itself in the structural form of a pyramid. The component already has its proper standards. The composed as well, in order to not declare the veritable individual – for where is the limit between the component, already partially composed, like a thermo contact, and the assembly of assemblies: this is a question not of simple denomination, but from the point of view of usage. A car battery is a component, but it is itself composed (electrolytic plates, insulators, terminals, plugs for the release of hydrogen by electrolysis). An assembly can also be a crowd rather than a society. We discussed the broadcast antenna field of Villebon; here every antenna is independent of the others. Only the buildings containing the emitters can create a line between the antennas, because a building can contain several emitters that “output” to separate antennas. Between them, the antennas are mostly compatible

than associated. Whether it acts as compatible or veritable association (as with directional antennas), the technologized (technisé) also takes on the meaning of a work of art.

A gathering of emission antennas is a type of ensemble, like a metal forest it reminds one a bit of the rigging of a sail boat. This gathering has an intense semantic power. This cable, this pylon radiating into space, and every tree leaf, every herb strand, for hundreds of kilometers, receives an infinitesimal fraction of this radiation. The antenna is immobile, but then it radiates. It is, according to the English word “an aerial”, an air. And in fact, the antenna plays with the sky on which it slices. It is a structure which cuts through the clouds or on the clearer background. It belongs to a part of a certain arial space that is sometimes disputes with planes, as is demonstrated by the example of France – Culture. Even on a car, the antenna, especially if it is a broadcast antenna, bears witness to the existence of a non-material and energetic world.

To return to the plains of Villebon that extends on the side of the Ulis (Courtabeuf region), where are found two extraordinary water towers in the form of a corolla supporting a narrow vertical cockpit. With a clear color, the finesse of the structure, means that at dawn, the caress of the sun’s rays underline their circular relief. For the longest time, the aesthetic of the water tower aesthetic

has been a problem for architects. To be functional, the water tower must be higher than all it is serving. By consequence, it dominates all that it serves, and thus it must be placed on the highest place, which makes it visible from everywhere. We could try to resolve the problem presented by the effraction of the water tower on a site by cosmetically camouflaging it, by the means of inessential additions. This is what was done at Culhan. An ancient castle, near the bridge, is flanked by round towers with pointed roofs covered with red tiles. The water tower, which cannot be missed when one sees the castle from the bridge, was made to resemble the towers of the castle: It as well is covered with a pointed roof and old tiles. But we see well that it is a water tower, of a fairly recent construction and which attempts to resemble the rest of the castle. This materialized lie doesn't really add anything to the site's charm. It manifests only to the point that we can go on the course of an architectural mimic.

On the plain of Villebon, there extends an industrial zone of Courtaboeuf, nothing is imitated of a modest ancient architecture. The roads are new and perfectly asphalted. At the periphery, several ancient forms have remained. Their wall of millstone grit and their arched gates create a contrast with the industrial and commercial installations in the centre of the zone. The joy that we experience by circulating between the new constructions is at the same time technical and aesthetic. The techno -aesthetic feeling

seems to be a category more primitive than the aesthetic feeling alone where the technical aspect is only being considered by a functionalist angle, which is impoverishing.

For the longest time, a certain form of house construction let the material and structure appear simultaneously. It is a type of half – timbered^{vi} (tudor construction) house (for example, the Plumereau square in Tours). The members are assembled in squares and rectangles. Between the timbers, the masonry infill is constructed from stones and a mortar binding them to bricks. The angles are of upright wood and are sometimes covered with nailed slate tiles to avoid the effects of rain and dew. And the ensemble forms a relatively firm block that, should the foundations be insufficient, deflect without disassembling or breaking apart. However, if we were to exclude the wood, very precisely cut based on the direction of the fibers, the materials by themselves are not of a very high quality – if we scratch a brick with our nails, they would deteriorate to a fine powder, probably due to an inadequate firing temperature. With a brick from the XIX century, it is the nails that break: the carbon era has modified the quality of materials. We should add that houses have party walls that contribute in stabilizing by a mutual support what they are carrying.

No parging violates the timber structure. The technique appears geometrically as a intersection of forces.

Simondon, Gilbert (1924 – 1989)