

4 Heroical Individualism

Hajas

I should like to discuss our theme from two points of view: 1. from the point of view of the need for art modern industrial mass-society; 2. from the point of view of reflections on the need for art of modern society manifested in modern art itself.

As a starting point I shall indicate some mental characteristics of modern industrial mass-society which seem to be important in the field of artistic creativity as well as in thinking about art. The mass-society of modern industrial-technological age does not exist as real „art-consumer“, does not exist as real community - only hypothetically. In reality there is no homogeneous mental community, there is no real public neither real „social reception“ of works of art, — i.e. a reception according to collective-traditional values and stable conventional validities and a reception of a „social ego“ as a member of a real homogeneous society; there is only „individual reception“ in our age.

„Individual reception“ of works of art is also determined by historical motives and cultural moments; it means that the modern individual, — i.e. the individual of the age non-mythological worldinterpretation —, has the very task to create his own individual value-structure and his own attitude-systems because of the radical lack of collective-traditional-ritual worldview and attitude-regulation. There is no collective ego in our age, only the very individual need for a „collective ego“ of the modern industrial mass-society. There is no „social ego“ in our age, only the very individual demand on „social ego“ who is not a „result“ of social circumstances but the very creator of social structure. There is no real „social ego“ in our age, only the artistic-imaginary „presentation“ of a new social ego according to the very individual fictions of this new — imaginary — „social ego“, who is not determined by social regulating institutional mechanisms but who is able to create new systems of social life. One can reveal the artistic-imaginary „presentation“ of this fiction of a new „alternative“ value-system in the whole history of avantgarde art.

In the ages of mythological worldview and clearly defined and severely practiced attitude-modells determined by this stable mythological worldinterpretation there was a close and stable relationship between the sphere of the „social individual“ and the sphere of the collective-traditional-ritual values. In the 19th and 20th centuries, when the industrial-technological mass-society gradually becomes more and more impersonal, and social life is organised with more and more complicated and mediatory systems, the idea of a real „social ego“ becomes a fiction.

We can speak about the „statistical ego“, who is only a „factual member“ of the impersonal mass-society and a passive „result“ of social „facts“. There is no mythological worldview to determine his attitude-patterns and his thinking — from inside; there are only impersonal directing-regulating institutional mechanisms which determine his attitude-possibilities — from outside. In the avantgarde art the role of opposition derives from this situation: the radical protestation against the impersonal directing-regulating institutional mechanisms and against the manipulating systems of social-political structure. But that is the very moment from which the subjectivism of avantgarde art and attitude derives, too; because the avantgarde art is left alone in its struggle for the creation — symbolical-imaginary creation — of a new kind of „social ego“, — i.e. a „conscious ego“, who is a real member of a real mental community in which the art is a real communicative and value-presenting vehicle supported by collective social validities —; because the avantgarde artist can create the artistic-imaginary fiction — the very subjective fiction — of a new imaginary society and a new imaginary „social-ego“ and between the two poles the fiction of a new value-presenting art only in himself. His individual fiction of a new imaginary mental community expressed in his visual-plastical imagery can be supported only by himself; there is only the modern individual, — the individual of the avantgarde attitude —, who is able to create an alternative inside world demonstrating a mental community and a mental universe imaginarily evolved by himself.

To present an alternative fiction of an imaginary mental community and to present a new „conscious ego“ according to this artistic-imaginary fiction worldinterpretation and social activity: that is the very task of avantgarde art and that is the very moment which is not accepted by modern industrial-technological mass-society of our age.

From this moment we can understand the expansive quality of avantgarde attitude: the artist wants to realize his own fiction of an alternative „mental universe“ and worldinterpretation in social life. Works of art can be regarded both as spiritual models of these alternative fictions of imaginary mental communities and as visual-plastical representations of alternative value-systems demonstrating a new individual and new ways of self-creation and social activity.

The avantgarde artist rejects the position of the passive „statistical ego“ of the impersonal industrial-technological mass-society and tries to create a new „social ego“ in the field of artistic-imaginary fiction. At the same time he creates the demand on a new kind of art as well as the demand on a new kind of art-consuming. His vocation is not only to create new validities and artistic-imaginary fictions of new mental community and new alternative worldinterpretation but to create a new kind of reception of his messages. He must to create a new kind of public and a new kind of „social reception“ of works of art: a new and authentic reception of the „social ego“ as a real „art-consumer“, not only as an „art-buyer“. His try is individual — it cannot be different. His message is individual: his very fiction of new value-systems is individual — it cannot be different. There are no universal validities, neither collective-traditional values, only the subjective desire for new validities and only the artistic-imaginary fiction of new universal value-system.

The social, political, ideological, philosophical experiments of the 20th century tend towards the creation of new „universal validities“ and a new homogeneous society determined and organised severely by these „universal validities“. These experiments are individual in the deeper sense of the word because they try to create „new validities“ voluntarily — but these „new validities“ are as individual as historical-relative; these „new validities“ are neither „universal“ nor „collective-traditional“. From the point of view of historical-political-sociological structure these voluntarily evolved experiments try to ensure the political-ideological-financial supremacy to one social stratum, to one political group or class.

There are a lot of similar moments in the „overall need“ for art of these voluntarist cultural-politics. One can study this model in the policy of education and art-needs of the Italian blackshirt-fascist and German national-socialist totalitarian states as well as in the cultural politics of the Hungarian pre-fascist tendencies of the first half of the thirties. The moments of manipulated utilisation of art as one of the most suggestive vehicles of the ideological propaganda of a totalitarian state reveal themselves in the voluntarist-dogmatical demand on art of the Stalin—Zhdanov era. The hierarchical-dogmatical-neoclassical aesthetical system — in reality: pseudo-system — suggests the average man the real existence of a collective-traditional-hierarchical structure of values, in which there exists a harmonical and stable relationship between the individual and the community. This hierarchical pseudo-aesthetical system suggests the illusion of a real community and a homogeneous society with its collective-traditional values and severely — from inside — determined attitude-models. This illusion of collectivity suggests really existing „validities“ established on „tradition“ and on „historical values“ — in reality this illusion is only a manipulating vehicle in the hand of the ruling political group or stratum. Since this homogeneous society with its collective-traditional-historical-ritual values and its very attitude-models does not exist in reality, the aesthetical suggestion of this pseudo-unity and pseudo-value system needs illusionistical means and false vehicles in order to be able to express the feeling of belonging to a real community. The emotional „sweet style“ of a false idyll of the average man suggests a harmonious social situation as well as peaceful family-life protected by the strong totalitarian state. The severe and rigid classicism suggests the other pole of the manipulating system of the totalitarian state: the illusion of strength, power, unity, self-confidence and historical mission. This illusion is supported by the rigid and narrow-minded dogmatism as well as the terror of monumentalism and megalomania. In reality there is neither „collective art“ — „social art“ — nor „social need for art“, only manipulated-illusionistical „pseudo-art“ and manipulated demand on pseudo-art.

The modern „consum mass-society“ of the late 20th century seems to be unable to create real „collective validities“ in the field of aesthetical creativity because it does not exist as a real mental community established on collective validities in the social life. The consum mass-society as a statistical mass-society does not need the art as a method of self-expression or self-creation because of the lack of collective social meanings and messages of universal validities. There is no „social need for art“, neither a „mental unity“ which needs to express and to self-demonstrate and to symbolize itself in works of art. There are only individuals — tragically „great individuals.“ —, both artists and art-consumers, who try to create an art of true self-expression and tragical self-demonstration and try to receive the messages manifested in works of art. Self-expression and self-demonstration in the individual need for art and individual desire of the „creative ego“ who is left alone with its inner need for artistical symbolization; and the results of aesthetical self-demonstration, i.e. the works of art created by these individuals, are received by various social groups, strata, microcommunities quite differently. These various social strata have quite different „needs for art“ as well as different education, different attitude-models, different social aims. The society of modern industrial-technological age does not exist as a „mental unity“, as a whole; there cannot be an art which expresses the society as a whole; there cannot be an art which is accepted by this statistical society as its own self-expression. This impersonal mass-society is totally unable to express itself: there is no „self“ of this mass-society which needs for „self-expression“; there are only individuals who try to express their own fictions, their own images of a new individual and their alternative worldinterpretation. The aggressive, provocative quality of avantgarde art is a vehicle to make the society clear that there is only one possibility for art: the struggle for true self-expression and self-creation — i.e. the artistical-symbolical creation of the fiction of a new value-system and a new image of man —, can be the very way of the creation of a new harmonical relationship between the individual and the free community regulated purely by itself.

Modern art shoulders the mission to show the way of the fiction of aesthetical-mental development from the situation of „statistical ego“ determined by the industrial-technological mass-society towards the „social ego“ — i.e. a „conscious, self-made, self-created ego“ — of a non-existing imaginary mental community of free creativity. Modern art represents various individual fictions of new mental communities supported on different value-systems as well as the different alternative fictions of the relationship between the „self-created individual“ and the free community, and between the artistic self-expression and self-demonstration and social reception. Avantgarde art has created from its very beginnings not only new alternative fictions of artistic communications between the creative individual and the community but it has shouldered to raise new need for art, too. As Theo van Doesburg formulated in the artistic program of De Stijl: „The truly modern artist — i.e. conscious artist — has a double vocation; in the first place, to produce the purely plastic work of art, in the second place to prepare the public's mind for this purely plastic art... It wishes to make modern man receptive to what is new in the visual arts.“

We can continue: the truly modern creator has the very vocation to produce works of art representing real value-structures which reflect the mental and social situation of modern individual and symbolize the different alternative ways of self-expression, self-demonstration and self-creation — „self-education“ — against the manipulated regulating-directing systems of modern consum mass-society; and to prepare the public's mind in order to be able to understand the situation of modern individual. The tragical new image of man reveals the true situation — mental situation — of modern individual; the different alternative fictions of world-interpretation and community-shaping reveal the historical subjectivism and historical task of avantgarde art; the reevaluation of mental-ideological systems enables the artist to create new alternative value-systems — that seems to be the very task of avantgarde art today.

What are the relevant possibilities for the artist of our age in this situation? Is artistic creativity a real area of mental-spiritual-imaginary selfcreation and social-ideological thinking? Is there any function of art in modern industrial mass-society?

In reality there is a very narrow track for artists of authenticity, although it seems to be a colourful prosperity of artistic activity. It seems to me that there are three main trends of artistic communication – i.e. aesthetical-imaginary creativity directed on understanding and making understandable our existence – which are parallel in time but different from the point of view of value-representation.

The first trend I could call „analytical-systematical examination” of the visual-plastical communication, – i.e. all sociological and mental messages and signs which are communicable in the area of visual-plastical signals; this field of sign-making and space-developing I call with a shorter term: plastical semantics”. In this area of visual-plastical expression and communication the artists try to chart the whole world of „things” and „thing-like” relations, the whole world of „objects” and „object-like” effects – i.e. colour, form, material, measure, space, environment, surroundings, movement, development, etc. – as well as the whole world of visual-plastical emblems. In this attitude practiced by the artists in the field of „plastical semantics” the artists try to chart and realize the uncharted areas of visual-plastical communication – the artists’ fantasy is bound to the discovered and realized moments of these areas. Their terms are either the „things” themselves or „thing-like” relations as well as the „objects” or „object-like” effects and emblems – I call all these effects „pseudo-scientific” vehicles. In the whole area of „plastical semantics” the „things” – or „thing-like” relations – „objects” – or „object-like” effects – and the emblems play the leading role.

The second trend of aesthetical-imaginary creativity in the situation analysed in the first part of my study I could call „self-demonstration – self-protection”. In this area of expression and communication the artists try to demonstrate themselves, to present their own individual existence in different – and mostly negative – situations caused by the modern history of industrial age. The artists try to create an imaginary inside world, a fictive-fantastic environment spiritualized by their own range of importance and „designed” by their own alternative thinking and legend of self.

This area of selfexpression and selfdemonstration is the area of defence: the artists create imaginary thing-like relations and fantastic situations as a whole fictive-imaginary microcosmos in which they feel secure and free. This fictive-imaginary microcosmos preserves the position – mental-intellectual-spiritual position – and „aura” of self; it manifests an independent alternative world as a fictive mental environment of self. The self constitutes a fantastic world based on his own poetry and mythology; history becomes to be a free and unbound field of fantasy and poetry as well as an area of imaginary „history-creation” and „history-interpretation” of self. In this field of poetry everything is possible and acceptable because everything is a result of the dreams of self: outwardness of the visual-plastical appearance becomes to be inwardness of the real existence of self. One could say that this aesthetical-imaginary creativity is the area of intellectual experimenting of self; I continue: this field of creativity is the area of poetry and romanticism where self can realize his own individual existence in the sphere of imaginary fiction.

Individual mythology is a fictive-fantastic world of self; a fictive-fantastic world of subjective interpretations and recreations of things, signs and history. This subjective interpretation is the very source of legend. Self needs these legends in order to be able to constitute his own alternative-imaginary microcosmos. The tragical beauty of this subjective imaginary microcosmos is the very beauty of the dreams and the desire; decorativism and profusion are covering terms of fear of self. Subjective imagery is a defence of self. Freedom and profusion are parts and terms of this picturesque aesthetical-imaginary territory; aesthetical-imaginary fiction of a subjective microcosmos is a spiritual fortress against the outside world of negativity.

The third trend of artistic creativity of authenticity I could call „heroical individualism”. From the first trend to this area I see a tendency toward the totality of individual vision of existence and toward individual responsibility. In this area of creativity self becomes to be aware of his definitive solitude, of his dangerous responsibility and tragically awakes to the consciousness of his heroical vocation which he can fulfil only quite alone: to be able to demonstrate in his own image the tragedy of modern mankind. That means: to show the vision of danger, destruction and negativity; to present the fight for the real existence and for the integrity of self; to show the tragical passion of individual for himself and for the freedom of selfcreation; to manifest the invisible effects caused by freedomless situations and freedomless thinking; to present the extreme poles of human attitude in which the deepest meaning and the fullest image of our existence is available, because there are no covering moments of the manipulated every day life of the impersonal mass-society. The artist’s vocation is to present the negative image of man and the tragedy caused by this total negativity – in this vision the artist destructs himself, or with more exact terms, the artist destructs the human image in order to show the power of negativity and the real dangers existing in modern mankind itself – and through this process of destruction, which is an ascetical one, he manifests in his own fight a new image of man: the vision of the heroical individual. Dangers and negativities are neither external moments nor distant phantoms: solidity and dread are facts, of every day life as well as they are parts of our inside existence. The very source of authenticity of the area called „individual view” which is the intellectual basis of the aesthetical-imaginary vision of „heroical individualism” is capability of artist to manifest in one suggestive image the invisible area of the tragedy of modern mankind and the courage to present the extreme poles of human attitude in his own image: in the destruction and recreation of his image.

This seems to be the very „subject-matter” – in the deepest sense of the word – of the aesthetical-imaginary vision of Godard, Pasolini and Visconti; this is the heroical „individual view” in Dostojewsky’s visionary novels – where total negativity, i.e. value-destruction, and total positivity, i.e. value-concentration – appeared in one suggestive vision of real human image. It is not accidental that there are a lot of reminiscences of Dostojewsky’s fantastic vision in Visconti’s pictures where the magical reality of total negativity and total positivity and the mythical fight between these two poles manifest themselves.

The aesthetical-imaginary creativity of „heroical individualism” presents the two poles and the two extreme areas of inside image of modern ego; the negative totality of loss of values — where self is destructed even by this negative totality, by power of „nothing” — and the tragical totality of value-concentration — where self is destructed by himself in order to show his struggle for himself and to manifest the destruction caused by the power of negativity and fear — and through this tragical action self-redeeming manifests itself: it is self who is able to redeem himself because of consciousness of tragedy. Responsibility and tragical consciousness are moments of „heroical individualism”: the artist knows that there is no redeeming besides him, he must be aware of his own real existence and he must create himself and he must understand his own individual vocation. He knows that he is the only responsible creator of himself; his vision of negativity is the real view of existence. He knows and he must manifest his knowledge. But this knowledge is not a result of analytical-systematical „pseudo-scientific” examination: his knowledge is an intuitive-imaginary vision. Between the two extreme poles of human image there is the territory of rationalism, where things keep their clear plastical forms; this is the area of objective „pseudo-scientific” research and visual-plastical sign-language. But the very poles of totality, the vision of total negativity and total positivity — which are results of loss of universal validities — is invisible from this area: the extreme antipoles of totality — which are secreted in every day reality — are comprehensible only by imaginary vision. This individual vision is neither „objective” nor rational. There is only one relevant category which can be applied because it expresses the truth and importance of this visions: authenticity.

From this statement becomes understandable the category of „authentic” history of art. There are columns in the „objective” history of art on which the building is not a result of an analytical-descriptive research — this research can discover the facts and relations of facts as well as dates, personal documents, events and sociological structures and instruments —; it can discover the facts in their own closed area of relevancy and historical-sociological relevancy but not the real and deepest importance and truth of their spiritual-imaginary message manifested in the aesthetical-imaginary vision of the „great individuals”. Authentic history of art does not deal with facts and dates; it is not a history but a permanent and intuitive interpretation of works of art — or rather visions. Of course I know, that this permanent and intuitive subjective interpretation is a historical product, too. I know, that this attitude is also a historical one; and I know, that this view is an answer of self on the questions posed by modern history. But this self-reflective knowledge and recognition does not limit the relevancy of subjective interpretation of visions manifested in works of art.

The columns of my own building are „great individuals” whose visions present the new tragical image of man and manifest the heroical struggle for self against the power of „nothing”. There are neither stylistical questions nor dates and events — only the deepness of the suggestive dramatic vision of individuum.

That is the very reason why I don’t speak about the whole situation of Hungarian avantgarde of the late seventies; that is the reason why I don’t analyse the whole development of artistical creativity in this period, but I show only one artist’s vision: that of **Tibor Hajas**. I am convinced that in his imagery — both in his photo-works and performances — the authentic image of man manifests itself. His dramatic-fantastic situations and tragical but „rigorous” dreams present an invisible but — tragically — true and real vision of fear, danger and power of negativity. His body becomes to be the messenger of his dramatic vision; His selfdestruction is the deepest expression of apocalypse of self. His dreadful spaces of fear and passion present the tragically truth of modern age. There is no solution — there is the definitive destruction of self.

There are a lot of elements in Hajas’ vision which can be found in Pollock’s and Kline’s imagery of abstract expressionism as well as in Arnulf Rainer’s images of inside-faces: that is the very moment of intensity of forces and tensions of the self. And that is the very moment of Hajas’ aestheticism and the aestheticism of my interpretation: we never reject the moment of „aesthetical expression” and „aesthetical articulation” which don’t mean for us pure decorativism but they mean concentration of spiritual tensions and associative imagination. Aestheticism is a special source of a lot of connotations and imaginative opening for deeper levels of existence which can be expressed only by aesthetical-imaginary fictions created by the artist. Action and the visual-plastical surroundings and the rests of this action have the same importance in Hajas’ imagery: they embody the medium of certain sensitiveness of inner imagination which are the messages of Hajas’ visions. Aesthetical shaping is not a decorative covering of the inside dreams but the very concentration and expansion of the vision.

I regard Hajas’ activity as one of the most suggestive and deepest views of the real existence of modern man who is the object and subject of fear. Fear is the fundamental feeling of the modern man; fear is the central moment of Hajas’ art. His heroical individualism is responsibility: his imaginary-artistical vision demonstrates the deepest image of man, the authentic view of our existence-in-danger.

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