

Art as tension

A vignette in honor of Stephen Spender & Louis McNeice

Lausanne, 1990

§1. Art has been seen as tension as a permanent state of strife found, to follow Spender, in the difference 'between ... inner and outer, subjective and objective worlds'.

§2. Art, thus, expresses a differential, a rickety bridge of two landscapes, of two mythologies that have been given various labels that include inner-outer, internal-external, subjective-objective, humanist-antihumanist, will-fate, nature-nurture...

§3. Is a differential the locus of art's birth?

If with Spender art is brought about in, of from difference, he also makes reference to the Freudian tension resulting from the inability that one experiences to adjust on one's social environment, or, in other words, the inner world of that which takes the form of a self is in constant fret with its outer world, its environment.

§4. Ob-jectum: two aspects lie beyond us as extensions of being, as prosthetics to the self ... transcendent:

The *context* ... that which one comes into being ... an array of events ... political, social, familial, ethnic ... the other...: modes of thinking and doing ... cultures.

The *imperative* ... that for which one comes into being ... procreative, industrial, capitalist, technological ... the other...: modes of doing and thinking ... cultures.

§5. Cultural reality:

... in brute reality there is no
Road that is right entirely
(MacNeice: *Entirely*)

§6. Why? Because:

The world is crazier and more of it that we think
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.
(MacNeice: *Snow*)

That is difference.

§7. Sub-jectum: that which lies within and (is thus under) one self. A shaped identity made of ... cravings, wishes, desires, obsessions, ideas – bright and obscure – in motion ... fluid ... it touch with a parent, friend ... the other:

Maybe we shall know each other better
When the tunnels meet beneath the mountain.
(MacNeice: *Coda*)

§8. So how does art fit in all this?

If art is thought as “tension” it seems that this signifier is somewhat frail to carry the load of differences between ... say the subjective and the objective and that which happens in between them, i.e. difference itself. Art is rather a sequence of “explosions” and “bursts” of laughter and cries in a ‘dyspeptic age of ingrown cynics’ where ‘the excess sugar of a diabetic culture [is] rotting the nerve of life’.

For reference:

ZAMAROS, PANAYOTIS (1990), *Art as Tension - A vignette in honor of Stephen Spender & Louis MacNeice*, DrZ Network, URL, date of retrieval.