

Proposal for a model to be used in criticism
of written texts.

(Aesthetic approach)

(1) There are at least three fundamental approaches to the critical analysis of written texts, (if by "written texts" is meant any phenomenon known or suspected to be composed of signs signifying elements of a spoken language). (a) The approach that aims at analyzing the text as to the meaning it conveys to the receiver. (b) The approach that aims at analyzing the text as to the structure which orders the signs within the text. And (c) The approach that aims at analyzing the text as to the effect it has on the receiver. One can call (a) the "semantic" approach, (b) the "syntactic" approach, and (c) the "aesthetic" approach, and one can say that the three approaches tend to coincide and to overlap, the nearer they advance to the text they aim at analyzing. The meaning of a text depends on its structure, and its structure depends on its meaning. The effect of a text depends on its meaning, and its meaning depends on the effect it is having. The effect of a text depends on its structure, and its structure depends on the effect the text aims at creating. It is therefore not very useful to try and establish a hierarchy of the three approaches, and say, for instance, that a "syntactic" analysis is fundamental for the "understanding" of a text, or that an "aesthetic" analysis is pragmatically decisive. After all, approaches to a phenomenon are means to provoke the phenomenon to show its essence, and it is the response of the phenomenon to the provocation that will decide which of the approaches is the most adequate to it. There are texts which will respond better to a syntactical approach, (like demagogic texts) others that will respond better to a semantic approach, (like scientific texts,) and still others that will respond better to an aesthetic approach, (like poetic texts), but all texts will reveal their essence more or less fully only if all three approaches are made to coincide on them.

The concrete wealth of any phenomenon, but especially of phenomena as complex as written texts, precludes a passive attitude of waiting for the phenomenon to unfold itself its essence. If one wants to seize the essence, one must approach the phenomenon and look at it ^{from} various points of view; one must so to speak walk around it. The three approaches to written texts mentioned are methods to walk around texts and try to see them from the three sides which they offer the beholder. It must however be remembered that if the text is penetrated by any of the three approaches, the approach is no longer useful. The penetration of the text, which is its "understanding", fuses all possible approaches into one single grasping of its message. A true criticism of texts will therefore surpass any of the three approaches. But it will be unable to avoid any of them in its initial stages.

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tant issue Moles and the other collaborators take it more or less for granted that the difference between semantic and aesthetic analysis is the difference between the discovery of the significance denotated by the signs, and the significance connotated by them. As if the aesthetic dimension of a phenomenon were the parametre of connotation projected by the signs it is composed of. But, of course, this is not so, and the analysis of connotation lies still within the field of competence of semantic analysis, (it is still a "discovery of meaning"). This lack of method, (and of terminology), does not even allow the demarcation of the field of problems with which the aesthetic approach is concerned. This is the reason why for instance Moles's analysis of Kitsch, and Berger's analysis of the signs in our surrounding is not in fact an aesthetic analysis at all, (although the authors seem to believe it), but is a semantic analysis of connotations. (This explains why these works, if taken as aesthetica, seem to be superficial, but if taken as semantica, provide deep insights.)

This seems to be therefore the situation at present, as far as critical analysis of written texts is concerned: They are more or less perfectly analyzable as to their syntax. They allow conflicting, although more or less systematic, semantical interpretations. And their aesthetic analyses tends to result in subjective, more or less emotional, exclamations. We are, as far as aesthetic analyses are concerned, restricted to "intuition" of the type Heidegger proposes, or to comparisons of the type Read proposes, or to ideologies of the type Adorno, (and Lucacs), proposes. This is a highly unsatisfactory situation, if we consider that the critical analysis of written texts (for instance of poems or posters), must serve as a model for critical analyses of our cultural situation, (if we define "cultural situation" as a context in which all the objects that compose it can be taken as signs partaking in various "texts" in a somewhat wider sense of the term). How unsatisfactory this situation is can be seen if one reads important works aiming at the "reading" of our cultural situation, like Moles' "Théorie des objets" and Quine's "Words and objects".

(3) In the beginning of this paper an effort was made to circumscribe the field of competence of the aesthetic approach, by saying that it is concerned with the analysis of the effect the message of a written text has on its receiver. This accords well with the etymology of the word "aesthetics" which implies "living experience", or "feeling". The effect of a text upon the receiver is a sort of vibration, ("sympathy and antipathy") which again results in a behavior of the receiver. Now here lies the crux of the problem. The syntactic and semantic approaches to texts take texts to be discourses through which an emitter, (the writer) communicates a message to a receiver, (the reader). But the aesthetic approach to texts takes texts to be attempts at a dialogue between emitter and receiver, (writer and reader).

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For the first two approaches the texts are channels of discursive communication, in the sense that they convey messages to receivers which are either indicative or imperative information. (Texts convey what is or what ought to be to their receivers.) But for the aesthetic approach the texts are channels of dialogical communication, in the sense that they demand of the receivers to react to their message. (Texts convey an invitation to action and passion to their receivers, and this is the aesthetic aspect of their message. This is what Rilke had in mind when he said that the message of the torso of the Apollo of Belvedere is: "Du must dein Leben aendern" (you must change your living) Now this aesthetic aspect of messages of texts is not imperative, (as some semantic aspects of messages are), but it is "open". It does not impose, it proposes. This is what is dialogical about them: they demand response, and they put the responsibility for the response upon the receivers of their message. (The answer to Mozart's symphonies are Beethoven's symphonies, and a poem of love is, from an aesthetic approach, not the communication of a love experience, but the answer to another poem of love which the poet has been reading. Now this is the reason why Moles, (and others), confuse the aesthetic dimension of messages with the parameter of connotation their signs are projecting. Connotation does allow the receiver "freedom of interpretation" within the parameter of signification, and this freedom is being confused with the responsibility the aesthetic dimension of texts imposes upon receivers. But in fact this is not so. The freedom of connotation is an "exegetic" freedom, and there is nothing dialogical about it. (It is the discursive freedom of commentary, for instance the Talmud.) And the aesthetic freedom is a challenge to assume the responsibility for the creation of new and original information. (It is the dialogical freedom of response, for instance of philosophical dialogue in the Socratic sense of the term.) One cannot begin to capture the aesthetic dimension of texts, (and other phenomena), without having clarified this distinction of freedoms.

Now the problem is this: having clarified the distinction, and thus delineated more or less the field of competence for an aesthetic approach to texts, (namely as the field in which texts reveal their dialogical aspect), is there a method to articulate more or less "objectively" the results of aesthetic investigations? Or is one condemned, by the essence of the approach itself, to articulate the results in the form of subjective "responses" to the texts, of the type "I like this"? In other terms: must the aesthetic approach always result in a subjective answer to the text analyzed, or is there a method, (or methods), through which an aesthetic analysis of texts may result in a disciplined discourse? In a discourse that is meaningful to others, whatever their response to the aesthetic dimension of the analyzed message? Can aesthetic criticism result in more or less "objective" statements? If not, we are in a stalemate, and "de gustibus non est disputandum". If yes, there can be a "theory of aesthetic perception". The answer to this is the purpose of

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this paper.

(4) Let us try to find phenomenologically whether written texts, if approached with an aesthetic attitude, reveal some characteristics which may be considered inherent in the texts, and are therefore a basis for any aesthetic experience no matter who, when or where can have of their message. If we succeed in this, we shall have found categories for an "objective" analysis of the aesthetic ~~critical analysis~~ ^{aspects} of texts, and if we do not, it is our duty to admit that any aesthetic analysis of texts will always be an analysis of the private experience of the receiver of the message. For the purpose of finding "objective aesthetic criteria", it is necessary to put our knowledge concerning the character of written texts into brackets, and try to experience such texts as attempts at a dialogue with ourselves: try to allow them to speak to us dialogically. In other words, we must ask ourselves: how do these texts speak to us as if we were their partners? The texts that speak to us are composed of two-dimensional shapes, (which we know to be letters of an alphabet which we have learned how to decypher), and these two-dimensional shapes are composed in lines which run horizontally on a surface called "page", and which follow each other on the page in a vertical succession. This is how we "normally" recognize a phenomenon to be a written text: a page covered with two-dimensional shapes within a successively linear structure. Therefore, "normally", written texts provoke in us the living experience of a "Gestalt" of two dimensions, wherein relatively small ~~two-dimensional~~ shapes follow a one-dimensional structure. To this we "normally" react by following with our eyes the lines that appear on the page, and we call this eye movement "reading". Now this appears to be a universal category of the aesthetic effect written texts have on their receivers: a characteristic eye movement. And this category can be made a criterium for an "objective" aesthetic criticism of written texts: in what way does a given text approach this "normal" experience, and in what way does it depart from it? It is a visual category, and in this sense the aesthetic experience of written texts is similar to the aesthetic experience of drawing.

But we have learned also that the two-dimensional shapes called "letters" are signs which signify more or less successfully the sounds of a specific spoken language. They are, at least within our civilisation, a sort of musical notation of spoken language. We know of this so deeply, that this knowledge approaches automatic reaction, (in a somewhat Pavlovian sense), as can be shown by lip-reading. We reproduce the sounds which the letters signify, (at least mentally, if not physically), while reading. In fact, there are signs within the alphabet, (like "?" and "!"), which are not true letters but signify a specific melody of spoken language. "Normally" therefore written texts ~~the~~ provoke in us the living experience of a "Gestalt"

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which can be called "the musical flux of a spoken language". To experience this "Gestalt", (through physical or mental "reading aloud"), is our "normal" reaction to written texts, and this appears to be another universal category of the aesthetic effect written texts have on us. And this category can be made another criterium for an "objective" aesthetic criticism of written texts; in what way does a given text approach this "normal" experience, and in what way does it depart from it? It is an auditive category, and in this sense the aesthetic experience of written texts is similar to the aesthetic experience of music.

We have thus found phenomenologically, (by allowing written texts to speak to us, and by watching our response to them), two different criteria for an "objective" critical analysis of their aesthetic message. These criteria provide us with norms: the norm of a specifically structured page, and the norm of the musical flux of a specific language. Of course, it might be difficult to define those norms exactly, but there are at present methods and instruments that permit a close approach to an exact definition of the norms. What is important about these two criteria of written texts is, among other things, the fact that they are in a dialectical opposition. Written texts have an inner aesthetic dialectics, which pushes them either in the direction of music, or in the direction of drawing, and while reading we feel this dialectics. This inner tension, as it transfers itself from the texts toward ourselves, is characteristic of reading. It is this tension which provides an important aspect of our pleasure or unpleasantness of reading. A critical analysis of texts from an aesthetic approach must take this tension into account, and, in fact, it will try to allocate any given text its corresponding place within this sphere of tension. It will try to articulate, as exactly as possible, the way any given text resolves or does not resolve that tension. Thus the two criteria provide us with a sort of "objective" system of coordinates, in the Cartesian sense of the term. Each text can be allocated two indices, ("x" for visual "Gestalt" and "y" for auditive "Gestalt"), which will indicate the degree of its departure from norms.

We need not rest satisfied with the discovery of these two criteria, however. Let us recall that the aesthetic approach to texts takes them to be proposals for a dialogue which we can, (or should), establish with their writer. Now of course any text can be thus taken, which means to say that any text has an aesthetic dimension to its message. But, in fact, in the living experience of reading a text, we discover then some texts provoke our response much more strongly than others. They are more truly dialogical, more "authentically" aesthetic than others. In fact, this discovery of the degree of provocation to dialogue in a text is our purpose in reading. We read, in order to have an experience, which means in order to be changed by the text, in order to dialogue with it. This, too, can be considered a universal category of the

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aesthetic experience of written texts, and it can be stated as follows: Texts can be ordered, (taking this category for a criterium), into a series of increasing provocation to a dialogue with them. Such a series will have, as one horizon, texts that are pure provocation, and as the other horizon texts that do not provide any provocation. The texts that approach the first horizon may be called "authentically" aesthetic texts, in the sense that they aim deliberately at a dialogue with their readers. And the texts that approach the second horizon can be called "inauthentically" aesthetic texts, in the sense that they seem to aim at a dialogue with their readers, while in reality aiming at making any attempt to reply to them a nonsensical effort.

Here the following problem arises: can the category of provocation to dialogue be made into a criterium of critical analysis "objectively" valid for all readers? Or does not the degree of provocation of a given text depend on the subjective situation of the reader? So that some texts are provocative to some readers, and not to others? In other words: can it not be that although the category of provocation is a universal aesthetic category, any criterium derived from it will be subjective?

This methodological problem is difficult, no doubt, and it must be admitted. But there seems to be a way out of it. This way is indicated by the inner dialectics of the category "provocation". The dialectic is this: Texts are read for the discovery of provocation within them, and if no provocation is found, the texts are considered unsatisfactory in their aesthetic dimension. But if provocation is found, it is felt to be disturbing, and a great amount of provocation is felt to be aesthetically intolerable. This indicates an "objective" norm, which is, this time, to be found not in the texts themselves but in the readers who are provoked to respond to them. This norm permits us to establish a second series, not of texts, but of readers, a series parallel to the series of texts, and having, equally, for a criterium the degree of provocation. There will be a "normal" reader which occupies the center of the series, and the series will point to a horizon of the reader who reads in search of pure provocation, and to another horizon of the reader who reads in search of no disturbance. The two series together will provide a sort of objective criterium for the measurement of the degree of the aesthetic dimension in written texts, having their dialogical character as a point of departure. This will work as follows:

Any given text will be matched, as far as its degree of dialogicity is concerned, with a "normal" reader. There are means, at present, to define the "normality" of the reader in such a way that it approaches exact definition. If the text is found to be more or less satisfactory for the "normal" reader, (namely if it contains the degree of provocation to dialogue that satisfies the "normal" reader), it will be taken, itself, as an aesthetic norm. The series of texts, having the degree of provocation to dialogue as its criterium, w'

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have such a text as its point of departure. However, it will be discovered that such an "objective" scale of aesthetic intensity will pose two different problems: One problem will be that texts considered intensely aesthetic for the "normal" reader, will not be so for an "abnormal reader", (and so forth). This problem can be solved, if every critical analysis always states expressly that it refers to the "normal" reader, and that it is "objective" in this sense. But the method allows the critical analysis to relate any given text to any given reader, by juxtaposition of the two series, and it will be objective in this sense. This means that the place allocated to a given text with in the coordinates of dialogical intensity will have two indices: "x" for the location of the text on its series, and "y" for the location of any reader on the series of readers. Such a system of coordinates will be truly dialogical, and in this sense it will reveal the essence of the aesthetic dimension. The other problem which the "objective" scale of aesthetic intensity poses can be stated as follows: It will be discovered that when advancing from "normality" toward the horizon of "pure authenticity" a critical point will be reached, in which the amount of provocation surpasses the amount of repression to reply in such a way that it changes the "normal" character of the message. (This critical point is well-known to the theory of information.) This critical point can be called "the point of originality", and it may be said that all texts above that point are "original" or "artistic" in an objective sense of the term. The same discovery is mirrored if one advances from "normality" toward the horizon of "total inauthenticity", and the critical point on the scale is the one where the amount of repression to reply surpasses the amount of provocation in such a way that it changes the "normal" character of the message. This critical point can be called the "point of Kitsch", and it may be said that all texts below that point are "Kitsch" in an objective sense of the term. (Such an objectivation of the meaning of the word "Kitsch" seems to be in full agreement with Moles' analysis of it, although it was elaborated by an entirely different method.) The category of provocation to dialogical response thus provides critical analysis of written texts from an aesthetic approach with objective criteria, which if taken in connection with the criteria provided by the visual and auditive categories of texts may allow the articulation of the results of analysis in an objective and discursive fashion. Emotional exclamations like "I like this" can thus be avoided. Aesthetic criticism may thus begin to have a family resemblance with syntactical and semantic criticism, because it will dispose of an acceptable terminology, and of a more or less disciplined method. Of course, the categories and criteria elaborated here are not the only ones possible, but they suffice to establish a provisional model for an "objective" aesthetic critical analysis of written texts, or at least they suffice to see whether such a provisional model can function in critical praxis. Such a test of a model will now be suggested.

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(5) The enclosed sketch pretends to be a map of the aesthetic aspects of written texts, in the sense that it provides the coordinates within which any given ~~texts~~ ^{text} can be allocated a place corresponding "objectively" to its aesthetic message. It differs structurally from geographical maps in that it does not represent two dimensions, (latitude and longitude), but three dimensions, (visual Gestalt, auditive Gestalt, and dialogical provocation). It is therefore a two-dimensional projection of a three-dimensional structure. The model it proposes should be a wire cage with three sets of wires. The sketch should be used in this sense.

In the center of the sketch there is a point of origin, ("O"), which is the place where "normal" texts are located. They are "normal" in the sense that that they provoke the normal page Gestalt in the reader, the normal Gestalt of the musical flux of the language they signify, and the normal relationship between provocation to dialogue and suppression of dialogue for the normal reader. Such normal texts can be notated thus: "T_{0(1),0(2),0(3)}".

The sketch forms a rectangle with the corners A,B,C,D, (which represents a three-dimensional parallelepiped), and which signifies the geometric locus of all written texts in the strict sense of the term. Phenomena located outside the rectangle are not strict written texts, although they may approach written texts in some aspects. The line "A-D" represents the horizon that divides written texts from drawings. The line "B-C" represents the horizon that divides written texts from musical notations. The line "A-B" represents the horizon that divides written texts from para-texts that are too original to be deciphered. The line "C-D" represents the horizon that divides written texts from para-texts that are too chaotic to be deciphered.

The sketch is divided by two axes, (the horizontal axis of "Gestalt" normality, and the vertical axis of provocation normality), and measuring scales can be designed on these axes. The horizontal axis represents two, (the visual and the auditive), dimensions. Thus the rectangle is divided into four sub-rectangles. The sub-rectangle "A-E-O-H" represents the geometrical locus of all texts that depart from visual normality and are dialogically authentic. The sub-rectangle "E-B-F-O" represents the geometrical locus of all texts that depart from auditive normality and are dialogically authentic. The sub-rectangle "O-F-O-G" represents the geometrical locus of all texts that depart from auditive normality and are dialogically inauthentic. The sub-rectangle "O-G-D-H" represents the geometrical locus of all texts that depart from visual normality and are dialogically inauthentic. Examples for texts in the first sub-rectangle are concrete poetry and instructions how to use a tooth brush. Examples for texts in the second sub-triangle are lyrical poetry and political proclamations. Examples for texts in the third sub-triangle are texts for jazz songs and demagogic proclamations. Examples for texts in the fourth sub-rectangle are comic strip texts and posters.

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The sketch can be folded along each of its two axes, and two cylinders can thus be formed. If it is folded along its vertical axis, drawing and musical notation, conceived as para-texts, will fuse, which is an experimental proof of the ancient concept of fusion between "musiké kai mathematiké techné". Thus the visual effect of a Mozart concerto, and the auditive effect of a Mondrian drawing, for instance, will be taken account of. If the sketch is folded along its horizontal axis, too original para-texts and too chaotic para-texts will fuse, which is an experimental proof of the ancient concept of fusion between "genius and madness". Thus the para-texts of Mme. Blavatsky will show their pathological, (chaotic), and therefore automatic and inauthentic aspects, and the para-texts scribbled by paranoiacs will show their original, and therefore authentic, aspects. In other terms: the folding of the sketch to form two cylinders will show that its four horizons, ("drawing", "music", "genial authenticity" and "pathological alienation"), are the result of cultural convention. This again shows that the sketch, if used as a map for aesthetic criticism of written texts, is "objective" in the sense of "culturally determined". And this is quite in order, because aesthetic criticism is a discipline, not of natural science, but of the sciences "of the spirit", and its objectivity must be culturally determined.

The sketch includes two horizontal sub-axes which have been called "tropics". The "tropic of originality" and the "tropic of Kitsch", and they represent the two critical points discussed in this paper. Thus the sketch is divided into four zones which are geometrical loci. The zone between the horizon of authenticity and the tropic of originality represents the geometrical locus of texts that are objectively artistic. The zone between the tropic of originality and the axis of provocation normality represents the geometrical locus of texts that are authentic prose writing. The zone between the axis of provocation normality and the tropic of Kitsch represents the geometrical locus of texts that are cliché prose writing. And the zone between the tropic of Kitsch and the horizon of inauthenticity represents the geometrical locus of Kitsch texts. Examples of texts in the first zone are some philosophical and scientific writings. Examples of texts in the second zone are some technical and pedagogical writings. Examples of texts in the third zone are newspaper texts and most personal letters. Examples of texts in the fourth zone are pornography of a specific sort and commercial propaganda. This explains, among other things, the aesthetic attraction of some philosophical and scientific writings, and the aesthetic nausea provoked by commercial propaganda in the normal reader.

Now the hypothesis is advanced that all possible "true" written texts, (and by extension of the sketch, many para-texts as well), can be inserted in the map in such a way that their aesthetic effect upon any possible reader is more or less well defined by their position in it. Application of the map

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to the praxis of aesthetic critical analysis of written texts will prove or disprove it. This is therefore a "working hypothesis" in the strict sense of the term, and it is important to stress again that it was formulated upon phenomenological considerations. It is not a model imposed on the phenomenon "written texts", but but it was imposed by the phenomenon itself upon the researcher.

(6) The map can be easily quantified by the introduction of scales on the two axis. In fact, since the "Gestalt" axis represents two dimensions, such scales will allow the attribution of three coordinate indices to every text examined. These three indices will represent an objective judgement of the aesthetic message. The present paper refrains from suggesting such a quantification of the model it proposes. The scales themselves must be true to the phenomenon, namely to the dialogue between text and reader. They must therefore be established not only by theoreticians of communication, but by psychologists, sociologists and logicians as well. Such a collaboration disposes at present of a sufficiently refined scientific apparatus. It is to be hoped that a satisfactorily defined terminology and more or less universally acceptable table of norms will result from such a collaboration. To provoke such a work is one of the aims of this paper.

But it is to be stressed that the model here proposed is an "open" proposal. It is quite possible that during its application in praxis it will be discovered that some objective aspects of the aesthetic effects of texts are not accounted for in the model. It is also quite possible that other defects of the model will be detected. This is quite in order. A true model must change in the dialectics between itself and the phenomenon it is applied to. The elasticity of the model proposed is a proof that it is not an ideological model. The attempt to avoid any ideologization, (and therefore idealisation of the model and reification of the phenomenon), is a further reason for the abstention from quantification.

Lastly it must be said that what seems important to the writer of this paper is not that the model he is proposing be proved workable or not in the praxis of aesthetic criticism, but that the necessity of an objectifying model for the praxis of aesthetic criticism be recognized as an urgent problem. That it be recognized that the field of aesthetic criticism must somehow be objectively defined, and that methods appropriate to the field be discovered. This is a further reason why he refrains from a more refined elaboration of his model. This paper is meant, of course, as a proposal of a workable model, but even more it is meant as a provocation for the elaboration of "better" models. The paper is therefore, itself, dialogical in this sense.

(7) Aesthetic criticism of written texts is in itself important, because without such criticism no true understanding of texts is possible, and because written texts still play an important role in our surroundings. But it is

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even more important if we consider, (as already stated at the beginning of this paper), that the critique of texts may serve as a model for the deciphering of the whole of our cultural condition. Therefore to propose a model for the aesthetic criticism of written texts is in a way a proposal for a model of a model of aesthetic criticism of our cultural condition. Now aesthetic criticism, if taken in this wide sense of the term, means existential criticism. It means the analysis of the effect our cultural surroundings are having on our being-in-the-world. We must try and analyze this effect, if we are to free ourselves partially from this determination. At bottom, therefore, the model proposed in this paper was motivated by the quest for human freedom and dignity in the face of a conditioning cultural apparatus. By an effort to assume responsibility in the face of that apparatus and respond dialogically to it. This paper should be read in such a context.