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BOOK REVIEWS

AESTHETIC COMMUNICATION - Rekha Jhanji.

Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, New Delhi. 1985. pp viii+141. Rs. 75/-.

This is Jhanji's third book on aesthetic theory. Aesthetic Meaning which is a study of the aesthetic theories of Freud, Croce, Spenglar, and Sartre appeared in 1980. Her second book, an edited one, on Communication and the Arts was published in 1984. Aesthetic Communication is in line with the work she began in 1980. It shows a progressive development of her thoguht form aesthetic meaning to communication. In the first work, her subject is exclusively Western aesthetics, while in the present work she blends her insightful understanding of the ancient Indian aesthetic theories with her excellent command of its counterpart in the Western tradition. This is an important difference; for it brings out a radical - and to my mind, a most desirable - change in her approach to the study of aesthetics. She writes: 'Whenever I have read a history of art or of philosophy I have found that the writers do not attempt to see the cultural tradition of humanity as a single unity. They treat the Western and the Eastern traditions as dichotomous, sharing nothing with one another .... Even an encyclopaedic mind like Hegel displayed a myopic vision of treating Western Europe as the centre of the entire cultural development of the world. Seeing this I felt the necessity of viewing the cultural tradition of humanity as one whole..... I believe that the problems of human experience are one, their contexts of origin may be different... And, one can enrich one's vision by turning to the ancient past of humanity and see if that can lend any insight

into an analysis and understanding of the contemporary situation' (p vii). This has been Jhanji's major inspiration in the present work. 'Since India has a rich tradition of art, the ancient Indians have reflected upon some of the philosophical problems pertaining to the arts with consummate finesse and dexteriti'.... And, if an attempt is made to blend the Indian and the European perspectives on the problems of aesthetics it can make a small contribution towards breaking the existing dichotomy between Eastern and Western world views' (pvii).. Having carefully gone through her book I feel that the work is a much greater contribution than the author thinks it to be. She has insight into both the European and the Indian cultural traditions, and she feels quite at home, in thought and expression, in moving with natural ease from Susanne Langer to Ānandavardhana, Bhartṛhari to Wittgenstein, Sigmund Freud to J.P. Sartre and to Vātsyāyana. Besides, she is equally good at exploiting examples from architecture, music, painting and sculpture.

The basic thesis of Jhanji's work is that the creator of art through his creation is able to communicate with beholder. This is aesthetic comunication; and it is possible because 'the work of art is a symbol (and) each of its elements... is potentially decipherable by the beholder' (p. 1). The whole book is a statement, analysis and elucidation of the conditions which make aesthetic communication possible. She devides her job into six chapters with a Preface and an Introduction. In the Introduction, she offers an analysis of the concept of an art work, the notion of symbol, and a detailed discussion of the four factors which intervene in the communication of a work of art. These factors are the attitude of the spectator, the artistic media, the historico--cultural framework of an aesthetic object, and the intention manifested in the work of art. Besides, it also includes a brief exposition of the salient theories

and treatises of the long ancient Indian aesthetic tradition which, later on, she uses as a background material for discussing the general problems of aesthetics; problems like, the interrelationship between the various arts, the relation between art and reality, unity of a work of art, aesthetic experience, criteria for the evaluation of different artistic media.

Two features are prominent in Jhanji's work: one, her rejection of the search for a priori definitions and two, in her analyses and discussion, her unfailing eye on the art history and the actual practice of the artists. She makes no claim to furnish an essential and universal definition of the aesthetic object. Throughout the work, she has her feet firmly on the ground of art history and the changing conceptions of art and aesthetics in different periods of society. 'If one glances at the history of art, one is convinced of the futility of the search for universals' (p 3) 'the search for essences is a futile venture', she contends (p 126). Nevertheless, as a working model, she defines the aesthetic object as 'a virtual creation evoking a particular in the spectator' (p 3); and she maintains that 'the principal raison d'etre of art is its communicability' (p 4).

Among the factors which generate 'a rapport between the manifest form of an art work and its imaginative reconstruction by the beholder; (p 4) she underscores the role of the attitude of detachment from all that is mundane and pragmatic (p 4) or what the ancient Indians have called sattvam. The aesthetic experience, on her view, comes close to the mystical and religious experience because all three have the same goal: the realization of the true nature of the spirit which results in the attainment of the transcendental bliss (p 6). She does not share Kant's indifference towards the distinction between art and nature' (p 6); for, if admitted, the distinction

has two unacceptable consequences : (1) One would never know if one has stumbled upon an aesthetic object...because, apart from the spectator's detachment, there would be no other way of defining the aesthetic object (p 6). (2) 'The whole notion of communication and rapport between the creator and the spectator would lose its meaning, with the result that the aesthetic domain could not be said to exist as differentiated from other domains (p 6).

Artistic media which render the physical dimensions of a work of art constitute another condition of the possibility of aesthetic communication. Each art medium has its own semantics - a code of communication or language. The enjoyment of art implies that one understands the rules of the particular medium and also the role which the individual artist has assigned to it in his creation. On Jhanji's view, art forms cannot be taken to be equivalent to ordinary language; and for this reason 'one can apply iconographic symbolism to all artistic creations' (p 9) in order to understand the logic of aesthetic communication. 'The work of art apart from its milieu is simply a craft' (p 9). Undoubtedly, the formal properties of a work of art make it transcend the spatio-temporal limitations; and this explains why we can, in contemporary times, respond to the ancient art. However, being sensitive to the formal properties of a work of art is not the same as aesthetic appreciation : 'it forms a part of the aesthetic experience but it does not exhaust it' (p 9). The historico-cultural elements - like mythology, theology, media, styles, and the condition of the age are equally relevant to the appreciation of a work of art.

The artists manifests his intentions in his art work. Sometimes, he states his intentions explicitly; but very often he does not; and sometimes there is the possibility of the existence of latent intentions

unknown to the creator himself (p10). To make aesthetic communication possible, we must know what these intentions are and for this we should place the work in its historico-cultural framework and relate this history with its formal properties.

A consideration of these conditions brings out clearly two important characteristics of Jhanji's strategy to tackle the problem of aesthetic communication. One, the existence of art justifies the thesis that art is communicable. This feature follows the pattern of Kant's transcendental argument. Two, creativity in the art domain involves a consciousness of the human situation in the midst of others. 'Art is essentially a human venture and it ought to be studied as such'.

Jhanji's analysis of aesthetic perception derives from recent researches in psychology and the pragmatics of language and it also takes into account the contextual conditions in which such a perception occurs. She agrees with Mikel Dufrenne that 'our perception is not passive; it is a creative activity which chooses, identifies, and organizes our sensory experiences' (p19). On her view, all perception is the solution to an enigma (p19). Aesthetic perception is different from ordinary perception in that it is an emotive and affective response marked by originality and the attitude of transcendence of the mundane world. In short, 'aesthetic experience is both sui generis and extra mundane' (p 45). Jhanji's characterization of aesthetic perception as extramundane is quite intelligible in the sense that this kind of perception is not geared to any pragmatic or utilitarian end. But, saying that aesthetic perception or experience (she uses 'perception', 'experience', 'appreciation', and 'enjoyment' interchangeably) is sui generis is uninformative. It would be informative only if she specifies at least one individuating feature which is true only of aesthetic perception and of no other kind; which unfortunately she fails to do.

In discussing the status of aesthetic object, she is concerned with two questions: (1) What is the differentia of an aesthetic object? and (2) How is it said to be situated in its milieu? Her answer to (1) is that an aesthetic object is different from a work of art which is a physical being; it transcends thinghood; 'very often the physical aspects of a work of art are contrary to its representative aspect' (p50). We say for example that a still life has depth, but the canvas is flat; that a Fresco has a void in the middle, but the wall is intact.' An aesthetic object is an imaginative reconstruction; by its physical nature it unfolds an autonomous world. This world, however dependent on physical categories, is not determined by it. The aesthetic object has its own criteria of evaluation and the criteria of the physical world are not relevant here (p53). Her answer to (2) is that the aesthetic world does follow the lived world (as for example in the case of the theatre) in its emotions, images, and symbols; yet 'the aesthetic domain is a domain beyond that of live life... the aesthetic object manifests the mundane world, but purged of its overwhelming involvements, it objectifies emotions' (p54).

Jhanji's discussion of the nature of symbols and the concept of meaning is crucial to understanding aesthetic communication. She posits two theses : (1) The aesthetic object is a symbol, and (2) meaning is the use of symbols. The second thesis is Wittgensteinian as applied to the interpretation of art symbols. (She uses the expression 'aesthetic symbols' as synonymous with 'art symbols' (pp 69-87). The first expression could be eliminated in favour of the second to avoid infelicity of language). She writes: 'Meaning is the use of symbols in a language game. If we understand the different uses of aesthetic symbols, we would understand the notion of aesthetic meaning' (p86). Thus, in the context of art aesthetic meaning would be the agreed participation in the

game of aesthetic symbols (p86). She admits that pictorial and poetic symbols are essentially similar, and that aesthetic communication depends on paradigms, nevertheless, she disagrees with J-P Sartre in that 'there is no difference between poetic language and other modes of artistic communication' (p84). On her view, aesthetic symbols in order to be deciphered depend on two types of situations: first, the semantics of a particular artist - the style and technique which he employes for interpreting the reality, and secondly, the historico-cultural associations that each object reveals.

On her view, 'art is one of the facets of human life' (p89); it cannot be treated exclusively as a formal composition, autonomous and independent in itself. Artistic creativity and communication is inextricably linked to its social milieu; knowledge of relevant history and culture is essential to understanding and responding to a work of art. She excludes from the domain of artistic activity all that which is not, at least potentially, communicable or decipherable by others (p90). Freedom is indeed essential to creativity, but too much of individualism of contemporary life is 'very damaging for the communication of art' (p106). Jhanji feels that effort is necessary to bring art to every day life by harmonising appreciation of nature with technology in order to rejuvenate creativity and its communication. 'The goal of meditative practices of ancient Indians which aimed at harmonising man with the cosmos must be pursued even in our days though the means may be different. And this goal can be achieved only if we obviate hierarchical relationships which corrupt men and distort their vision of one another. Then alone we would be able to reach out to other beings spontaneously' (p109).

In discussing the status of aesthetic evaluations, she argues that aesthetic judgements are neither absolute and universal nor are they disguised inter-

jections of personal feelings. Aesthetics is not 'a rehash of sensory preferences of various historical epochs' either. This is saying what aesthetic judgement is not; but this is not enough. She has also to tell us about the logical status and function of an aesthetic judgement, which, I am afraid, she fails to discuss in any detail.

In the last chapter, Jhanji lays down conditions for the future fruitful growth of aesthetics. Here, her tone becomes prescriptive. She writes: 'Aesthetics should go hand in hand with other disciplines related to the arts particularly the psychology and sociology of art... the researches in psycho-analysis and Gestalt psychology have opened new vistas in the understanding of artistic creativity and aesthetic perception, and sociological interpretations of art have furnished us with more comprehensive and integrated visions of the different movements in art (p125). Thus, philosophical enterprize in the domain of art should adopt an interdisciplinary approach: incorporating and using the discoveries of different disciplines' (p125). I agree with her fully. Philosophy, including aesthetics, has to go hand in hand with other disciplines in order to be fruitful and worthy. The aim of aesthetics, on her view, is to develop a general perspective based on the conclusion of these different disciplines - a darśana (vision) as the Indian philosophers call it' (p126). I am afraid, it is not clear what she means by this aim. Does she mean that the aim of aesthetics is to hone our instruments of appreciation of works of art? To my mind, her answer should be in the affirmative. In no case, however, does she seek to make aesthetics a science. For her, aesthetics remains a discipline which broadens our cultural perspective and helps deepen our aesthetic insight as well as enhance our appreciation of art.

She shows unclarity on the question of the method of aesthetics. On her view, 'the method of

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Language in Focus: Foundations, Methods and Systems: Essays is memory of Yehoshua Bar-Hillel

Asa Kasher, ed. Boston Studies in the philosophy of science, 43. Synthese Library, 89. Dordrecht, Netherlands : Reidel,. 1977. xxviii; 679;. hardbound and paperback issues.

What was to be a joyous felicitation volume on his 60th birthday turned out to be a mourning memorial volume to Bar-Hillel (1915-1975), who fortunately knew about the forthcoming volume. Bar-Hillel's interests were many, information storage and retrieval, mechanical translation, methodology of science and so on. But the decision to focus the volume on language was a wise one. It includes personal tributes from Chomsky (who was Bar-Hillel's young protégé once), Quine and others, a 100-item bibliography of his scholarly writings in Hebrew, English etc.,28 papers; and an index of names. The papers are grouped under the following heads: Reference and predication; Truth and meaning; Pragmatics, Methodological studies; Language varieties; Formalization; Points of view. The volume is truly worthy of the scholar it is dedicated to and this makes the reviewer's talk both easy and difficult.

When the present reviewer first came across Bar-Hillel's two brilliant papers, 'A Quasi-arithmatical notation for syntactic description' (Language 1953) and 'Logical syntax and semantics' (Language 1954) they opened up to his student-mind the vista of logic, semiotics, and philosophy beyond the confines of linguistics. It is a pleasure to take this opportunity to record his intellectual debt to this fine scholar, scientist, and intellectual of Israel. (Born in Vienna, he came to Palestine in 1933 and paid frequent visits to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s on research or teaching assignments.)

As Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman said on another occasion (justifying a seminar of philosophers and linguists at Stanford in 1969), "the success of linguistics in treating natural languages as formal syntactic has aroused the interest of a number of linguists in a parallel or related development of semantics. For the most part quite independently, many philosophers and logicians* have recently been applying formal semantic methods to structures increasingly like natural languages.... philosophers and linguists are converging it seems, on a common set of interrelated problems." The present volume reflects not merely this joint concern on the part of logician-philosophers and logician-linguists to develop formal syntactics and formal semantics but also a concern for the remaining member of the semiotic triad, namely, formal pragmatics which is only now coming into its own. A better tribute couldn't have been conceived to Bar-Hillel's role in bringing philosophers and linguists together onto the common ground of a formal semiotic of natural language.

In their scope the papers differ a good deal -- some are wide-ranging or highly theoretical papers, some are very specific applications or case studies, yet others are in between. In their mode of presentation some draw upon ordinary language for their examples as well as formulations and thus less technical, some use a good deal of symbolic logic for both these purpose, yet others are in between.

An interesting trend seen especially in the papers relating to semantics and logic is an alignment based on a pair of opposite tendencies. Let's call them I and II. Blaise Pascal gave them the evocative names -- esprit de géometrie (I) and esprit de finesse (III). Similarly psychological in spirit is

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* One may point out parenthetically that what motivated them was Rudolf Carnap's insight that to do scientific philosophy was to work out the logic of language.

William James's distinction between tough-minded (I) and tender-minded (II) philosophies. But perhaps it is unphilosophical to look upon this simply as a matter of temperament rather than as a matter of philosophical decision. Tendency I tends to be reductionist, sceptical, and base itself upon observable, uninterpreted, bare actualities. It is likely to make friends with empiricism. Tendency II tends to be phenomenological in that it does not shirk giving logical status to the "face values" that men assign to entities and relations and that are often reflected in ordinary language usage. It is likely to make friends with rationalism, except that one does not have to subscribe to the aprioristic doctrine of innate ideas in order to be an adherent of Tendency II.

One can briefly illustrate these two tendencies with reference to some recurring problems :

Identity (papers by Ayer, Katz): Is 'be identical with' a logical, de dictu predicate or a material, de re predicate? And how do we understand identity anyway?

Implication (paper by Stalnaker): When implication is a logical predicate, is it simply 'material implication' or rather (what is more satisfying intuitively) entailment? Entailment is obviously a richer notion than material implication; how rich can we make it and get away with it?

Categorical predicability (paper by Sommers) and the closely related notion of presupposition (paper by Herzberger): Do we need 'presuppose' as a subtype of 'entail' at all? If we need it because of ineradicable truth-value gaps, do we introduce it (and categorical predicability) in a gingerly way with great reluctance or do we even leave room for unformulated or even unformulable presuppositions?

Substance (substratum) and property (papers by Walther & Zemach, Glouberman): Do we need to recognize two kinds of predicates -- the nounish substance predicates or the adjectivish property predicates -- with only bare referent symbols or do we make do with only one kind of predicate and accept two kinds of arguments (or subjects), nouny ones and pronouny ones?

One can go like this down the list: relation (more 'externally' conceived or more 'internally' conceived), negation, existence, quotation, and so on. But the question that is increasingly being brought up nowadays is : do we have to reconcile ourselves with the existence of these two tendencies, shrug our shoulders, and doggedly continue with these presumably resolvable debates? Alternatively, one can look upon the tendencies not as 'ultimate' choices but 'contingent' policy decisions. If the latter is the case, what are they contingent on? On philosophical temperament (ā La Pascal and James)? Or do we bring in pragmatics to resolve the problems of semantics as earlier semantics was brought in to resolve the problems of syntactics (logic)? What insights can linguistics offer in this regard? (Of course some of the papers in this volume such as those by Herzberser, Cohen, Kutschera entertain these questions seriously.)

Finally, there are some good papers (by Agassi, Ranate Bartsch, Weiler, tor example) which touch upon aspects of the philosophy of language not covered by this tension between Tendency I and Tendency II.

One can't think of a better volume to make one aware of some of the insistent current debates in the area of the Philosophy of Language.

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