

BARRY ALLEN

## THE ART OF TECHNOLOGY AND THE TECHNOLOGY OF ART

Art does not express emotions. Art is not the *expression* of emotion; it is its embodiment. Expressing means ex-pressing, pressing out, through an exit. What is expressed is some stuff that comes out formed and expressed. Orange juice is expressed, pressed out. Emotions are expressed, pressed out, put out into the world in statements and other demonstrations of feeling. Art is not among them. Art is not a demonstration of feeling. If art demonstrates anything, it is mastery, genius, but don't expect the artist's emotional biography.

Art embodies certain aesthetic feelings. The work is one which compulsively moves. The work embodies such emotions as compel us to love it, to admire and stand in awe of it, to want to see or hear it often, to bring it into our life make it part of the world we make for ourselves. The important thing in art is the artifact. It does not express the emotions of the artist. Rather, it embodies emotions, select emotions, those which move us to love and admire the highest, greatest works of art. The work of art is an artifact which embodies certain particular emotions. Whether it succeeds in embodying those emotions has nothing to do with the artist's personal feelings, but everything to do with skill and craft.

Art is technology when it is the best that technology can be, when it too becomes an embodiment of the emotions that make aesthetic consciousness enjoyable and moving. Show me a bridge as moving as the works of Leonardo, and I'll call it a work of art. There are such bridges. At the same time, do not expect me to be impressed by technology merely because it is new. That has nothing to do with the problem of how to use it artfully, aesthetically, and ethically. It can hardly be a surprise that the first and oldest medium is still a major form of art—I mean painting. We have had some 30,000 years to work

on the problem of embodying aesthetic emotions in painted surfaces, with some notable successes on the way. Do you think it is going to be easier with new materials and media?

Art is the embodiment of aesthetic emotions. These are the feelings which make art compelling and wonderful and may be identified with beauty. By “embodied” I mean that the work itself becomes charged with these emotions. The work itself moves us; the feelings of the artist are irrelevant. Referring to music, supposedly the most expressive of the arts, Eduard Hanslick refutes the idea “that music is supposed to represent feelings.” Against that, he says: “To represent something always involves the notion of two separate things, of which one must be related to the other through a particular mental act. . . . [But] the beauty of a piece of music is specifically musical, i.e., is inherent in the tonal relationships without reference to an extraneous, extra-musical context.”<sup>1</sup>

The beauty of art is just a name for the success of art. A work is beautiful when it succeeds in embodying aesthetic emotions, the emotions that make it moving. Beauty is an important concept because it indicates the dimension of success in art. A work of art is not a generic kind of thing, which might equally be good or bad. Bad art is something that tries to be art and fails. To require that art be beautiful is to require that it succeed in an appropriate way. Art is not a neutral genus of which some is good and some is bad. Art is a form of excellence, a kind of success. There is no such thing as bad art. If it is not good, not successful, not beautiful, then it is not art. It is ugly. Ugly is something that *aspires* to be art and falls short.

Art is continuous with technology. Technology becomes art when it succeeds in embodying the aesthetic emotions that make art compelling. This does not happen very often. The point is that there is nothing stopping it from happening, least of all any categorical, essential difference between art and technology. Nothing is pure creation. Art is the work of human beings, an evolved form of life. There is no part of us that is unconditioned by this evolution. There is no immaterial part indifferent to the circumstances of our evolution. We should reject the dichotomy between pure imagination and technical execution. Execution, the actual making of the work, is creative when the work shows style. Style is a name for what is creative in the execution, the making, of an artifact. When the artifact shows great style, it becomes a work of art—whether it is a bridge or a painting, a sculpture, or a building.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Eduard Hanslick, *On the Musically Beautiful*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey Payzant (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986), xxii–xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> I elaborate on these conclusions about art and technology in *Artifice and Design: Art and Technology in Human Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

## REFERENCES

- Allen, Barry. *Artifice and Design: Art and Technology in Human Experience*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008.
- Hanslick, Eduard. *On the Musically Beautiful*. Translated and edited by Geoffrey Payzant. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1986.