

Prologue

Everything that is, requires to be named. But what is named demands to be thought. In such conventional statements there would be nothing controversial, were it not that what is not considered essential evades our cognitive attention. Why the thinker may ask, with some justification, should I bother with the marginal, when there are more urgent problems to be examined ... The need to answer essential questions has diverted attention from all that is not essential. Upon this principle traditional philosophy and, with it, naturally, aesthetics, has created its own arrogant conviction that all which does not belong to the aristocratism of the Mind is unworthy of consideration. Basing itself upon the idea of Logos, philosophy began to reject all that did not belong to the realm of thought and only that which was in the realm of thought merited inclusion in categorical discussion. This superiority of mind, would, in a triumphant advance to its highest definition, uncompromisingly trample on all it considered unworthy of itself and its final aims. This militancy of spirit, in whose pronouncements military and philosophic terminology intertwine, opened the way to the Absolute that abolished Difference, to that totality of sense in which there was no place for the different, to that cruel idealism that rejected all that did not belong to the ideal. Aristocratism of the spirit corresponded with the actual aristocratism: authoritative, arrogant, often precipitately selective. Every aristocratism flippantly rejected all it deemed unworthy of itself. Recognising the image of the world through its own portrait and likeness, it allowed the 'world' to escape it. No idealism deceives others as much as it does itself. It is its own limitation. Rejecting all that does not belong to it, it becomes the victim of what it has rejected. The concept of mind as totalising knowledge not only loses what has been thought, but even that which, though despised, defines the position and significance of mental power. Only thus may one explain the unheard-of surprise evoked by the appearance of Marx's work, for in it attention was directed to what, till then, despite its definitive nature, had nonetheless remained neglected: the problematic nature of economic existence had been avoided by every form of idealism, not merely because it contained nothing of the sublime, but because the spirit despises nothing so much as life in its immediacy. Critical philosophy

quickly came to the conclusion that what had hitherto been despised must be admitted to the sphere of philosophic interest, since philosophy itself had been erected, at least in a certain sense, by 'banality', as being over against it, since philosophy was a critique of banality and its 'results'. While philosophy remained in the phase of idealisation, it despised what was elementally human. Hence arose the idea that man might be delivered from falsehood, from subjectivism, kitsch, illusion, naiveté and other weaknesses through enlightenment, but critical philosophy demonstrated that the idea of enlightenment itself was false and unreasoned. Gradually there developed a doubt of Logos as the measure of things: the idea of Mind concealed true human nature and what was definitive remained unconsidered and outside its concept of totality. Indeed, what had once been spoken of as 'essential' showed that we must take account of the 'inessential', for only in this way could philosophic discourse be prevented from becoming a terrorism of 'higher truths'.

Modern aesthetics are coming to similar results. Having passed from aesthetics as *cognoscendia inferior*, via the power of judgement as a link between pure and practical reason, to aesthetics as 'the science of art' whose true significance lay only within a system which was also a constituent of a philosophic whole, in other words, of Absolute knowledge, aesthetics has, at last, broken free from its divided state, having replaced the search for an absolute foundation in higher spiritual forms with meditation concerning art as a free activity. Many dangers threatened aesthetics as a separate area of thought. To name just a few: aesthetics, as an attempt at a strict definition of concepts, remained, of necessity, traditional with regard to the change in artistic practice, which grew up according to its own laws. Aesthetics asserted itself as a priori knowledge of what constitutes art. This 'assertion' was regulative and, as such, authoritative, regardless of whether it referred to being, to a system or to a phenomenon itself. Art, then, had to be considered as a canon and the critic, consequently, as a privileged assessor who, by his authority, certifies the legitimacy of a work of art. Art itself, under the influence of Romanticism, gained the status of the 'sacral' which was not only 'above' but even 'beyond' life. This was followed by the idea of art as of a work of art, as a thing in itself the idea of a work as meta-historical, of a work that is not only transcendental as regards reality, but in its very emergence, was unconditioned by anything other than its

own nature. Thence, it was an easy step to the reduction of the significance of art to its aesthetic dimension and its meaning turned from the ritual and from life to the ceremonial and to what was deadened by the institutional. In the desire to discover the essential, the field of aesthetics itself became restricted. The work of art was reduced to its 'essence' and whole categories of the concept of art, of genres and 'profane' artistic forms were dismissed, that is to say, all that could not be fitted into the categories of the sublime and the incontrovertible. But, while this attitude gave rise to the idea that art was something great, difficult and serious, something which was almost a caricature of solemnity and worthy of admiration, later researchers pointed more and more to art as a 'specific form of commonplaceness', a game that was indissolubly bound up with life itself, just as it was, itself, in a specific way, 'life'. If one might say that the concept of 'openness', which has taken over philosophy and aesthetics in particular, has remained 'openness' only for those questions which were imposed upon us by the great masters of philosophising, one would still have to comment that modern thought no longer insists on the existence of privileged and capital problems. Everything may be the subject of thought and everything is worthy of thought. True, one may assert that fundamentality embraces all things from the position of profounder insight, but, indeed, the fundamental examination of art and of the speciality of a work demands that we are not drawn into its 'essence', but perceive also the marginal, that we turn our glances to the unimportant ... And that is our subject.

Our subject, then, consists of certain secondary matters, of things that have remained on the edge of intellectual interest, of what, due to its apparent simplicity, has been undervalued and despised. If the theme of the following essays may be summed up in one single sentence then, perhaps, it would be most appropriate to say that they draw attention to detail that marginally accompanies a work of art, yet is inseparable from artistic practice, be it a question of the 'circumstances' in which the artist is situated, or be it a question, and this is their subject above all, of the nature of aesthetic epiphenomena, or, finally, of the artistic creators' auto-reception of his work. Art, particularly contemporary art, has turned to the marginal, why then should it be avoided by aesthetic considerations which swear by art? Thought regarding the marginal does not allow us to be caught in the trap of the sacral purity of a work. A work

is not only itself, but also the factors that condition it. Indeed, one reviewer rightly said of Pirandello that he had "apparently a tragic life". The circumstances in which a work comes into being may have little interest for its receiver, since the emphasis lies on the work and not on its author, although they nevertheless throw light on the origins of the work itself. Thus the detail opens up yet another way in which a work is directed towards facticity, as well as the facticity of the work itself. In their own way, aesthetic epiphenomena prove the 'reality' of a work and its dependence on the social, as well as their belonging to the very same phenomenon from which they arose, for, without these epiphenomena, the work itself would remain incomplete, defenceless, unrecognised, even unrealised.

A work is simply inside itself, but also outside, in everything that precedes and follows it, in everything that surrounds it. A work is indeed valid without its epiphenomena, but it arises only in co-operation with them and only with them does it gain the status of a work. This detail which does not, indeed, reveal the whole but is often concealed by the whole, remains neglected mainly because it itself shows its significance. Sufficient that we point to it, to show that it exists! If epiphenomena tell us nothing about the essential being of art, they are, none the less, related to art and exist thanks to the phenomenon of art and thence we learn something of art itself. As the 'natural surroundings' of a work, they well up from the being of the phenomenon and are according to it, although they are not essential, they belong to the essence. They exist through the essential and point to the essence. So, in speaking of the secondary, we only apparently depart from the main object. The work remains at the centre of our interest, but now in a manner of non-existent absoluteness, for whose examination, system is no longer suitable, but, rather, the systematic approach in which the detail achieves its right to exist and aesthetics themselves, that reject any foregoing givenness and assignment, become a meditation on art in the manner of art itself: they create their subject, just as the subject creates them.

All texts in *On Some Secondary Matters* translated by Edward Dennis Goy and Jasna Levinger