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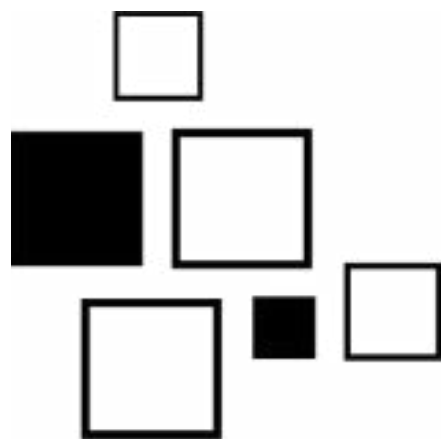
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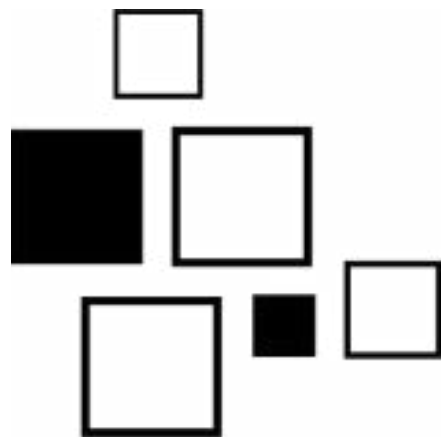
MARIO SCHENBERG IN BETWEEN ART AND SCIENCE

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Mario Schenberg is considered one of the most brilliant minds of the History of Brazilian Intelligence. Pioneer of the national Theoretical Physics, he is quoted by Einstein as one of the ten most important scientists of his time. Schenberg can unite Science and Art: he brings the acknowledgment of the name of the country in the field of Physics before the world and, simultaneously, he is interested in the trajectory of great Brazilian artists, showing the country's cultural potential. In his way of thinking, he unites the west and the east, Marxism and Buddhism. He is a multiple citizen without ideological frontiers. His magic way of looking at things made him admired, wanted and expropriated from liberty. Through intuition, Schenberg interacts in society and displeases the structures of power of the University of São Paulo and Brazil.

What conditions can lead an internationally renowned physicist as Mario Schenberg to develop a second activity that, apparently, seems so different, such as the art criticism? This is a question that is immersed in the studies of his personality. In many accounts and informal conversations, Schenberg says that the physicists, in general, are divided into Science and Music. So, why has he chosen the Plastic Arts? How does his aesthetic initiation happen? How does he get involved with the artistic circuit in Brazil? And how does he develop his role as an art critic?

The answers to these questions should not be searched in one single factor, but in several ones that have guided him towards art criticism. Mario Schenberg works on different fronts, setting relations with philosophy, magic, religions, politics, photography, sciences and arts. His personality is open to different manifestations, as well as his art criticism,



which is not restricted to trace strict parameters to the limits of art, but also presents intrinsic relations with reality.

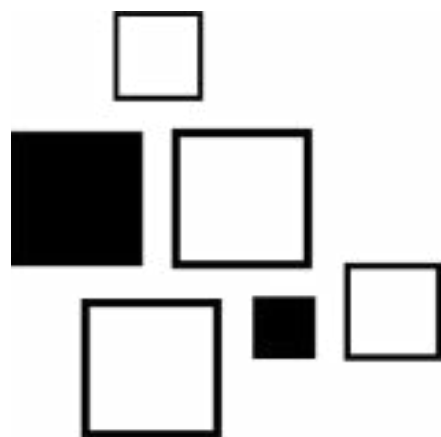
Schenberg has essentially a scientific education, and in his critical project there are some aesthetic appreciations with scientific content. This characteristic makes his criticism something unique. It is in 1942 that Schenberg writes about art for the first time, highlighting the work by Bruno Giorgio in the *Revista Acadêmica* (Academic Magazine). From this moment on, he starts writing about Volpi, Pancetti and Figueira Jr., without working systematically on the art criticism. He starts to relate with some critics from São Paulo, and became Lourival Gomes Machado, Sérgio Milliet, Maria Eugênia Franco, Ciro Mendes, Paulo Mendes de Almeida, Osório César and Jorge Amado's friend.

Mario Schenberg's critical production is wide from 1940 to 1980. It is always related to plastic arts. In 1972, he is intensely dedicated to the new artists that make part of São Paulo's cultural circuit, calling attention to names like: Mira Schendel, Cláudio Tozzi, José Roberto Aguilar, Mário Gruber and Teresa D'Amico. Schenberg and his critical work play a basic role in the national artistic scenery because of his efforts to articulate and encourage a constant art renewal, as well as for his political militancy, which resulted in the compulsory retirement of his classes in the University of São Paulo and consequently a deeper dedication to his work as a critic.

Is Mario Schenberg's criticism different from the others? The plastic artist Alice Brill makes a brief and informal comparison between Schenberg

and Geraldo Ferraz: "Geraldo Ferraz has always been a feared critic, he was very strict and demanding. He also used to have a less direct language than Mario's. Schenberg wrote (...) with much eloquence and generosity". As he was not a traditional art critic, it seems that Schenberg used to have much more freedom in his writing than the traditional literates. He has been treated with hostility many times for having his own style and for being free from the academic canons. Antonio Gonçalves Filho says, on the occasion of the launching of the book *Pensando a Arte* (Thinking Art), in 1988: "(...) as an art critic he is a controversial figure who distributes compliments with an annoying ease, constantly making mistakes in his prognosis (...)". Comments like this do not affect the idea that Schenberg institutes a different way of spreading Art and new artists. Instead of judging the plastic works, the art critic establishes personal relationships with them and their creators and, through this personal process, he can mediate sensations between work-artist-public. This way, his procedure in relation to the critical work is different from Sérgio Milliet's, who thinks that the success of a good criticism depends on the action of pondering about the artworks.

The incentive for the Arts is the central issue of Schenberg's criticism. One cannot deny the importance of artists like Alfredo Volpi, Teresa D'Amico, Mira Schendel, Cláudio Tozzi and many others who have their talents acknowledged, first, by Mario Schenberg. Can these artists be considered as a "wrong prognosis"? These artists' historical and artistic trajectories say that Schenberg is not wrong. The fact of supporting all the artists who looked for his help does not mean lack of criticism. Many artists report that Mario Schenberg is an inexhaustible source of expe-



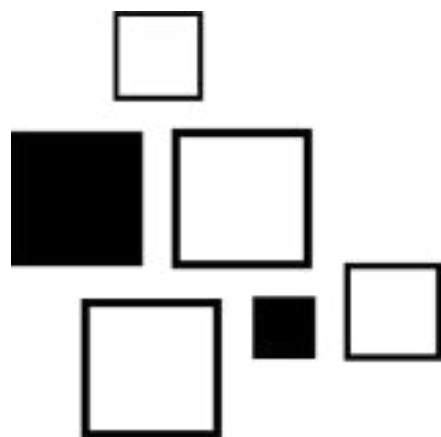
periences and compliments exchange because he believes that anyone who can make a living from art in a country like Brazil is a hero – worthy of acknowledgment. Some of his physicist friends say that Mario Schenberg is much more comprehensive with the artists than he is with the scientists. Being a communist brings troubles to Schenberg's position as an art critic. Militant of the Communist Party, he is leader of a group in which many people who are related to the intellectual and artistic world take part, such as: Maurício Nogueira Lima, Jorge Mautner, Dulce Maia, among others. However, the instructions of the Party in relation to the politically committed art do not change his opinions. He supports non-figurative trends, opposing, this way, the social realism recommended by the Communist Party. The official Stalinist orientation does not influence the aesthetic concept of the critic and communist leader. Schenberg disagrees in many points with the Party's orientations, and this is one of these disagreements.

Reviewing the ideas of the 1950s and 1960s, it is possible to realize how hard the Grupo Concreto (Concrete Group) works to separate the creative process in Art from intuition, considering it "arbitrary". For Schenberg, this "arbitrary" value called intuition is exactly the core of artistic creation. Because of these disagreements, in some moments, Schenberg's ideas contrast with the ones defended by the Grupo Concreto (Concrete Group) of São Paulo. Sérgio Milliet also disagrees with some statements of the Concrete art of São Paulo, which had Waldemar Cordeiro as its main defender. Cordeiro's disagreements are not only with Milliet, but also with Schenberg and other art critics.

After the first experiences, the number of critical texts increases, as well as the contact with the artistic world. In the 1950s, Schenberg prioritizes his scientific tasks. It is also the period in which he works as the Dean of the Physics Department in the Philosophy College of the University of São Paulo. It is possible to realize that the art criticism as his main activity gain force after his compulsory retirement from the University, in 1969.

As someone who used to spread ideas, it is important to consider Schenberg's contacts with some important figures of his time. The universe of personal relationships presented by the art critic is huge and enriched by his life experiences. All the ones who interacted with him are marked by long and continuing conversations, in which there are intense cultural exchanges. Many artists recognize, in their accounts, that they miss the meetings in the apartment on São Vicente de Paula Street. Many ex-students – current scientists or professionals from different areas – admit the importance of the debates shared with Schenberg for their lives. Based on the figure of Schenberg as a communicator, it is possible to say that his oral contacts have resonances in the cultural universe of the country. Lígia Clark gives an account that clearly illustrates Schenberg's presence/influence over the new artists:

The influence he had over my personality was enormous. I, without any cultural knowledge, used to absorb all the conversations I had with him, incorporating the experiences of his knowledge, and I used to joke: 'my ears were fecundated by two extraordinary beings, Mario Schenberg and Mario Pedrosa'.



Schenberg brings lots of new artists to the cultural circuits due to his wide and influent social relationships. He can also be seen as a patron because many of these artists mention that they used to sell their productions to the Professor. Mario Schenberg's collection is also increased by donations – as an exchange for his criticism, the artists used to donate one or more artworks. The impulse given to the new artists is one of the most relevant characteristics of Schenberg's criticism. It can be considered his main contribution to the Plastic Arts scenery in the country. The avant-garde project of São Paulo depends a lot on Schenberg and his fellows' opinions. It is a moment in which art needs to communicate with the public – the artwork and the artist must reach their spectators. The critic is the mediator, but he is not the only one; the artists also reflect and write about their artistic proposals. However the critic “used to see things that the others did not”. The complicity is one of the bonds of this communication among critic-artist-critic-public – a relationship that exists in all sorts of art criticism, but that is special in Schenberg's one, because the critic also needs a youthful look to update his opinions.

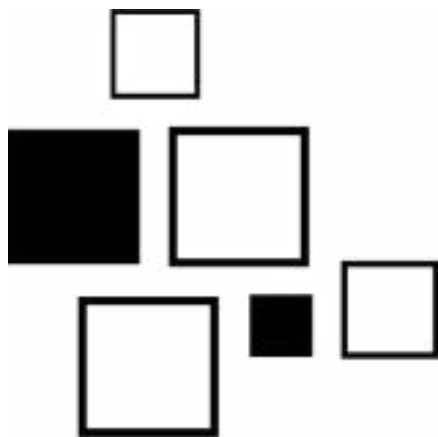
Schenberg has a scientific education and works hard on his artistic studies; for his aesthetic way of thinking, scientific knowledge is essential. This characteristic is one of the elements that make Schenberg's criticism something unique. There are other traces in his criticism that can also be identified as marks of distinction, for example, the use of intuition as a concept in the process of creation, or the eastern philosophy as a support for theoretical and aesthetic issues. All these elements can already be identified in his early works as a critic. The period from 1950 to 1970, in which Schenberg is acting in the field of art criticism is a phase

of transformation in art because it coincides with the emergence of the Brazilian avant-gardes. It was an epoch in which old canons such as the support, the classical techniques and the form are artistic characteristics questioned and reinvented by intellectualized artists who are looking for a new meaning and a new posture in face of the artistic process – it is a period of questioning art through art. The question that guides the productions is: What is the use of art?

The artists exhibit their proposals and some of them create new theories about their works and visual poetics, but the role of the art critic is still fundamental because the artistic environment needs intermediation between artist and public. Many artworks are proposals that need to be decoded and legitimized. At this moment, art becomes means and message – something pretty hermetic. For the great public, the ruptures are enormous because following the innovations becomes a matter for specialized people. The role of the critic is, essentially, to provide information resource for this initiation in arts.

Mario Schenberg develops a critical project using subsidies that are not common in other critical proposals already commented. These different concepts give Schenberg's criticism new paradigms before Brazilian art criticism. The first subsidy is concentrated in the aesthetic way of thinking of the Eastern art and philosophy. Zen, Hindu and Buddhist elements are used to explain his theoretical proposals. The Eastern philosophy is quite valued by Schenberg as it means a different way of thinking the world, spirituality and reality:

This sermon by Buddha is one of the most im-



pressive things because it inverts all the Western religious thinking that defines the gods as being above men. Buddha shows that, on the contrary, men are above the gods, it means, despite the fact that they are gods, men have a certain clairvoyance that no other being has (...) men is an axial being.

The critic makes a comparison between Western art, which values reasoning and improves itself through deep theoretical thinking, by requiring natural beauty from the artistic works – its objective application and clear, realistic and logical representations – and the Eastern art that, on the contrary, searches for the essence of life in the values apprehended intuitively and through spiritual insinuations. In Eastern art the spirit is highlighted; its glories are reached in the domains of contemplative mysticism. Another characteristic of eastern painting is the aversion to the reproduction of nature or the objects; its search is concentrated on the essence of the natural and not on its reproducibility. In this sense, the use of values based on Eastern Philosophy means a new concept – different from the contemporary western thinking, providing alternative possibilities for scientific, artistic and human progress. Living in a society influenced by capitalist values and by western roots, Schenberg finds in the Eastern art (or non-European art) support to construct a more impartial kind of criticism, stating Art as a universal language, free from western or eastern particularities, and proclaiming the institution of the Cosmic Art.

Schenberg emphasizes the real expression of the artist, its feelings in

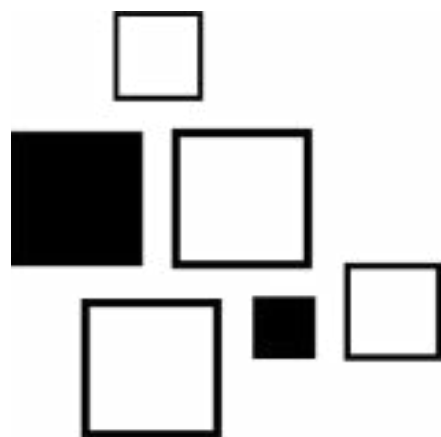
relation to reality, which means, its posture before life and the world. In parts, he is based on the specificities of Eastern Art in order to find out the source where the artist gets inspiration and produces the work of art.

In some recent trends we find a combination of influences from eastern Hindu and Buddhist philosophy and arts with surrealism. There are other interesting convergences of surrealism and eastern values.

Many critical texts point elements of eastern culture, such as the one dedicated to the artist Carlos Takaoka: “the progress of Carlos Takaoka’s art corresponds to the expansion of his eastern kind of pantheist Cosmo vision (...)”. Or the text dedicated to Mira Schendel: “in a second series of monotypes, she could get close to the Song landscapes (...)”. Or even in the text in which he refers to the art made by Ismênia Coaracy:

Being an expressionist is an artistic-existential state that can be reasonably unknown even for the artist, as it may have happened to Ismênia for many years. The Expressionism is not essentially an artistic movement of the XX century, not even something particular of the Western culture. About a thousand years ago we already had Expressionism in the Far Eastern art (...).

A second aspect in Schenberg’s criticism, maybe the most evident trace, is the use of scientific terms to explain the artistic proposals. As he is a theoretical physicist, terms like “science”, “cosmic”, “cosmo vision”, “cos-



mic unconsciousness”, “quantum physics”, “classical physics”, “logic”, “reasoning”, “mathematics”, “entropy”, “geometry”, “concentric spheres”, “universe”, “reversibility”, “technology”, among other terms are common. His main distinctive line uses the connection between artistic and scientific creation. For Schenberg, the interactions between these two fields of knowledge constitute a way of breaking the usual limits of a “common sense art”- understanding creation is dealing with artistic works without depriving them of scientific concepts. In many of his texts, he shows the artists the scientific principles that exist in their works, even if they have not realized the production of these scientific effects. The critic is the one who finds out this scientific characteristic in the artworks. It may have been a contribution to the meanings of the avant-garde art. This way, he establishes the connection between artistic and scientific creation, using a phenomenological methodology that has advanced over the researches related to human sciences.

In the interactive field of Art and Science, Schenberg calls the attention to the use of technologies for the artistic process and for the improvement of communication among men. In this sense, he agrees with Mario Pedrosa and Waldemar Cordeiro’s ideas. However, it is important to remind that for each one of these theorists the idea of joining art and science has specific meanings. For Mario Pedrosa, the traces of the Art-Science relation are based on the problematic of the form of the artistic object, what can be considered a result of his education in Aesthetics and mainly a result of the influence of the gestalt in his criticism. By pondering Cordeiro’s arguments and praxis it is possible to say that Cordeiro uses technological and scientific resources as support to reach

new visual effects, in other words, the partnership Science/Technique provides subsidies for artistic innovation. Schenberg’s directions do not attribute this “utilitarian” sense to Science. Science does not serve Art, neither vice versa. In Schenberg’s point of view, there is dynamics between both fields, in other words, it is a dialectic relation.

The two first aspects that make Schenberg’s criticism different in relation to the other theorists are immersed in a third element that is characteristic of his criticism: the use of intuition as a methodology for artistic creation and interpretation. Mario Schenberg defends the idea that intuition should guide the creation of aesthetic works; he does not disregard the logical and rational thinking, but he calls the attention to the use of rational skills, which should be pondered by intuitive sensitivity. In his artistic analysis, the critic tends to value artists who use intuition rather than rational norms in painting or sculpture. The critic also uses intuition to analyze the artistic projects he is shown. Many of his friends say that, before an artwork, he usually observes the canvas or sculpture for hours; then he closes his eyes and after some minutes he starts his appreciation.

In summary, by constructing his critical project, Schenberg defines himself as a mediator between the artist, the work of art and the public, unveiling the social function of the artist who should stimulate creativity in society. The social-political values in his biography are rather important. They are attributed the choices of the scientist/art critic. His join to communism indicates characteristics to his way of expanding art, and these specificities, from a Marxist doctrine, give the artist a differentia-

ted role in society. Apart from his contributions to national art criticism, Schenberg shows that human capacity can overcome obstacles, joining Art and Science.

