

Flotinus and Art

Approved in partial fulfilment
for the Degree of
Master of Fine Art

Rhodes University, November 1975

J.M. ROOME

CONTENTS

| | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| I Plotinus A.D. 205-270, Introduction | 1 |
| II Plotinus' Universe - A brief discussion | 5 |
| III Plotinus and Perspective | 8 |
| IV Art and Beauty | 14 |
| V Sight of the Mind | 21 |
| VI Nature, Contemplation and Art | 25 |
| VII Magical Images | 29 |
| VIII The Wisdom of Art | 34 |
| IX Plotinus and the Technological Age | 36 |
| Footnotes | |
| Bibliography | |

Acknowledgment must be made of the financial assistance of the
Human Sciences Research Council.

1. Plotinus A.D. 205-270 - Introduction

Plotinus was the last great philosopher of Antiquity. He has greatly influenced philosophy, theology, mysticism and art. He became the guiding force of thought in the west. Because of his stress on the autonomy of spirit he is a precursor of modern times. He was the founder of speculative mysticism which deals with states and stages of union with the absolute.

Plotinus greatly influenced Christian thought. He was first published in the fourth century when Christianity became official under Constantine. Ten centuries of the Middle Ages were dependant on his thought through the mediation of St. Augustine.

The Renaissance in the person of Marsilio Ficino rediscovered him. Later the Cambridge Platonists, the philosophers Berkeley and Hegel, and the poets Novalis and Goethe showed interest in him.

The Socratic conviction in the existence of the human Soul was re-thought by Plato and transposed by Plotinus into mysticism more rationalistic than religious. He cemented a centuries-long alliance with virtually all great philosophies of the West.

Only in modern times do we get deviations from Platonic tradition and Christian intellectualism - empiricism, behaviourism, Marxism, logical-positivism, existentialism.

Plotinus's influence on art is wide. Byzantine art was directly influenced by his thought and adopted many of his ideas on perspective and vision.

More recently he influenced William Blake. Also the group of artists known as the 'Ancients' which included Samuel Palmer and Edward Calvert. Nature was for them, as it was for Plotinus, the imperfect reflection of a divine archetype and it was the artist's duty to discover this archetype and to express it with maximum purity and intensity.

But Plotinus's ideas on art are based on a deep understanding of the truths of nature and the universe. Thus he can be related to all art which shows a similar understanding of truth and not merely that which is consciously influenced by him.

Plotinus saw himself as an interpreter and follower of Plato. In fact he made use of a profound knowledge of all previous philosophy selecting and rejecting his material like an artist and adding his own original ideas. The end result is a philosophy entirely his own.

His writings do not follow each other chronologically, but why should they? His 'system', for want of a better word, is implicitly present throughout as a totality in each particular theme. His approach to philosophy was like that of an artist's should be to his art. Each individual work should be approached as an entirety in itself.

Man is essentially isolated for Plotinus. He is NOT a "political animal". Society has no place in the search for God and the pursuit of happiness. Similarly society has no place in art and its search for truth.

The individual is important for Plotinus. He accepts, with Plato, the idea of personal individuality of souls and survival after death. Plotinus's philosophy is for the individual just as art should be for and by the individual.

Plotinus does not see man as the centre of the universe and scorns those who do. He rejects scientific humanism and looks to absolute standards, even to God, for laws of conduct.

The inner experience and return upon oneself is vital for Plotinus. His starting point is soul not nature. By means of purification and simplification the soul arrives at contact with the pure and simple Absolute, the One. So too the artist should be concerned with the inner experience, for art should be the individual's attempt to "come to terms with his own existence".

Porphyry knew Plotinus personally and in his introduction to the Enneads he gives some idea of Plotinus as a person and his manner of working. The picture of a highly intelligent and artistically minded individual, in the true sense of the word, emerges :

"He used to work out his design mentally from first to last : when he came to set down his ideas he wrote at one jet all he had stored in mind ..."

"Plotinus could not bear to go back on his work even for one re-reading ... his handwriting was slovenly; he misjoined words; he cared nothing about spelling; his one concern was for the idea."

A healthy disregard for grammatical systems!

³"In style Plotinus is concise, dense with thought, terse, more lavish of ideas than words, most often expressing himself with a fervid inspiration. He followed his own path rather than that of tradition ..."

⁴"He was entirely free from all the inflated pomp of the professor : his lectures had the air of conversation ..."

II. Plotinus's Universe - A brief discussion

Plotinus believes in a distinction between Eternity and time, the Ideas and the sensible, the here and Beyond. He stresses over and over the distinction between the "intelligible world" and the "sensible world". Things in our world of sense are for Plotinus merely images of what is contained in the world of "Nous".

The "intelligible" world contains three important principles; the "First" or "Good" or "One"; the "Intellectual-Principle" or "Nous", and "Soul".

The One or Good is the ultimate source of all things and cannot be explained or understood in the normal sense of the word. One can only grasp it by coming into union with it.

¹"All things are in the One and the One is not in anything, but All things depend upon It. There is nothing which contains It, but It contains All things."

The One has eternal life and therefore the order of all things is eternal. Things perish only so that others may come into being. That which has nothing into which it can be transformed does not perish. The One or Good is the Ultimate, it cannot be transformed therefore it does not perish.

The One is perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing and needs nothing. All things flow from the One. The One is not being but the generator of being. The cause of all things is none of these.

All things produce when they come to perfection. The One is always perfect therefore it produces everlastingly.

The One produces the Nous or Intellectual-Principle by a sort of radiation. Nous is next in order of perfection to the One. Nous sees and needs the Good. It contemplates the Good or One eternally and seeks to know it. Nous cannot grasp the One in its Absolute Unity and Simplicity and so thinks it in a multitude of images which are forms. Thus whatever Nous produces is composed of things which have the Form of the Good.

Soul is an activity of Nous. It exists in the world of Nous and descends into the material world. But soul can be illuminated by Nous and then is raised to Nous' level and becomes an image of Nous.

Universal Soul does not really enter body but illuminates and informs it, remaining itself unchanged and unmoved. Body is really in soul and not soul in body. The recipient receives as much as it is able. This explains why certain things in the material world show more evidence of soul than others.

Material things are made by the lowest phase of soul. This is done by receiving forms from Nous which it imprints without conscious thought.

Thus Nous is the ultimate creative principle in the material universe. All form springs from Nous.

Plotinus sees Matter as entirely evil, totally devoid of any shape or quality. Form is imposed on matter by the Intellectual-Principle through Soul, but matter itself is absolutely formless, non-being.

"So that which underlies figures and forms and shapes and measures and limits and is decorated with ornaments that do not belong to it and has nothing good of its own, but is a phantasm as compared with reality, and the substance of evil, if there really can be a substance of evil, has been discovered to be primal and absolute evil."

We can never see absolute evil or pure matter on its own. It is always overlaid with form from the Good.

³"The bad is bound in beautiful fetters - so men are able to look at the bad and when doing so may be in company with images of Beauty to remind them of the true beauty of the Forms of the world of Nous."

Thus man has the ability to gain insight to the world of Nous by means of looking at material form. The world of Nous, the Intellectual Realm, contains the true reality and all art should be an expression of this reality. Art which does not go beyond the material which does not investigate the soul in matter is concerned only with non-being and is non-art.

III. Plotinus and Perspective

In the treatise "Why Distant Objects Appear Small" Plotinus gives an explanation of why the size and colour of things appear distorted when seen from a distance. In so doing he anticipates the faults of the systems of 'aerial' and 'vanishing' perspective.

¹"Seen from a distance, objects appear reduced and close together, however far apart they be : within easy range their sizes and the distances that separate them are observed correctly."

"Distant objects show in this reduction because they must be drawn together for vision and the light must be concentrated to suite the size of the pupil; besides as we are placed further and further away from the material mass under observation it is more and more the bare form that reaches us, stripped, so to speak, of magnitude as of all other quality."

The sense of perception seems to be tricked when viewing things from a distance. 'Vanishing perspective' merely accepts the trick and tries itself to trick the viewer into seeing something he doesn't see. ²The Dictionary of Art and Artists defines perspective as "a quasi-mathematical system for the representation of three dimensional objects in spatial recession on a two dimensional surface." The deception or trick is backed up by scientific rules and reasons.

Plotinus puts forward that ³"it may be that we appreciate the magnitude of an object by observing the salience and recession of its

several parts, so that to perceive its true size we must have it close at hand." In other words the deception is understood and overcome by bringing the object being viewed close up. This makes 'inverted' perspective seem the more logical approach.

He goes on to give a very knowledgeable explanation of the distortion due to distance.

⁴"The phenomenon is more easily explained by the example of things of wide variety. Take mountains dotted with houses, woods, and other land-marks; the observation of each detail gives us the means of calculating, by the single objects noted, the total extent covered : but where no such detail of form reaches us, our vision, which deals with detail, has not the means towards the knowledge of the whole by measurement of any one clearly discerned magnitude."

At this point Plotinus also gives a way of investigating form which no artist can ignore.

⁵"Where there is variety and the eye sweeps over all at one glance so that forms are not all caught, the total appears the less in proportion to the detail which has escaped the eye; observe each single point and then you can estimate the volume precisely. Again, magnitudes of one colour and unbroken form trick the sense of quantity : the vision can no longer estimate the particular; it slips away, not finding the stand-by of the difference between part and part."

Plotinus is advocating that one must go through all the detail before one can arrive at a true understanding of the whole form.

He is being anti-classical and disputes the convention which by glossing over the detail and merely following the outline of objects attempts to describe form by ignoring it and fails to understand it.

To return to the matter of perspective :

6. "The distant object shows near at hand for the same reason : the intervening space is contracted; for though the nearer part is not subject to this deception, as soon as the eye reaches that part which is more remote, it no longer passes through it stage by stage so as to note its forms and therefore finds itself unable to report its magnitude."

This explanation of why we are deceived as to the size of distant objects seems far more logical than the idea of 'vanishing perspective'. To make the argument conclusive Plotinus makes one more observation :

7. "Those attributing the reduced appearance to the lesser angle occupied allow by their very theory that the unoccupied portion of the eye still sees something beyond or quite apart from the object of vision, if only air space.

"Now consider some very large object of vision, take that mountain for example. No part of the eye is unoccupied; the mountain adequately fills it so that it can take in nothing beyond, for the mountain as seen either corresponds exactly to the eye-space or stretches away out of range to right and left. How does the explanation by lesser angle of vision hold good in this case, where

the object appears smaller, far, than it is and yet occupies the eye entire?"

Plotinus also deals with the matter of colours fading when seen from a distance.

⁸"It may be that magnitude is known incidentally from the observation of colour. With an object at hand we know how much space is covered by the colour; at a distance only that something is coloured, for the parts, quantitatively reduced, do not give us the precise knowledge of that quantity, the colours themselves reaching us only in a blurred impression."

He puts forward that colours seen over a distance reach us faintly like sounds heard from a distance.

⁹"Still (it will be objected) the colours seen from a distance are faint; but they are not small as the masses are."

"True; but there is the common fact of diminution. There is colour with its diminution, faintness; and there is magnitude with its diminution smallness; and magnitude follows colour diminishing stage by stage with it."

The phenomenon of colour fading has now been labeled 'aerial perspective': ¹⁰"Owing to the density of the atmosphere all tone contrasts are muted and all colours tend towards blue in proportion to their distance from the observer." This may be true, but nonetheless it is an optical illusion. Our vision is tricked.

The grass at the top of the mountain is the same green as the grass at the bottom of the mountain. Art is not optical illusion and should not be misled by the trick.

It is interesting to note that ¹¹"the greater interest in aerial perspective is to be found in the north, particularly among the Impressionists." Art should see through deceptive "impressions", not accept and accentuate them.

Perspective, we are told, was ¹²"invented in the early fifteenth century, perhaps by Brunelleschi and improved by Alberti, Uccello and Piero della Francesca." Does 'improved' mean made more scientific and less artistic?

However we find Plotinus anticipating these people and pointing out the faults of their system centuries beforehand. Plotinus knew about perspective before it was supposedly 'invented', and he knew that it had nothing to do with art.

The ancient ¹³Egyptians too were aware of perspective and used it thoroughly. The point is that they did not use it as an artistic medium. Perspective was used for commercial purposes. For art they used subtle means of line and bass relief.

Byzantine art also shows a more knowledgeable attitude to perspective than the so-called 'advanced' men of the Renaissance.

¹⁴"In the representation on the base of the Obelisk of Theodosius, of the Emperor and his son watching a chariot race from the imperial box, the sculptor bearing in mind the hierarchial status of the personages represented, made the emperor the largest figure, although he is furthest away from the beholder, while the people in the lowest tiers are smaller, smallest of all being the chariots. The effect of this 'inverted-perspective' is that the spectator of the relief is not assumed to be located at any precise point in space and the scene is presented as if he were observing it through the eyes of the most important person figuring in it. This was the viewpoint recommended by Plotinus and his conception of space is illustrated in several other features of these same reliefs."

The Byzantines were not primitive. There was a ¹⁵"sophisticated and complex art where profound meaning underlay the form." They were familiar with the philosophy of Plotinus and recognized the worth of his ideas.

Perhaps if the Renaissance pinheads had been as wise we would have been spared all the systematic, scientific, non-artistic 'compositions' which litter art history.

Perspective is for railway-lines and telephone-poles which vanish into pinpricks. Pin-point perspective for pin-head people.

Perspective is a system. Systems have nothing to do with art. Systematic perspective has nothing to do with art.

IV. Art and Beauty

"Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon" - Picasso.¹

"Every attempt to achieve beauty is an attempt to give the local the attribute of the universal." - Charles Hoy Fort.²

"Intrinsic beauty is in the interpreter and seer, not in the object or content." - Wyndham Lewis.³

Man has always been fascinated by beauty. Opinions differ as to what constitutes beauty. Certain set canons of beauty have been established in the past.

The classical idea of the perfectly proportioned body; the idea of the perfect woman - Liz's nose, Sophia's eyes, Bridget's mouth; Miss World contests; the commercial image - the 'beautiful new Chevrolet.'

All these lay emphasis on the physical. All attempt to confine beauty within certain limits, make it adhere to academic principles.

But, as Picasso said, "Academic training in beauty is a sham."

Plotinus anticipates the sham and points the way to real beauty.

4. "Almost everyone declares that the symmetry of parts towards each other and towards a whole with a certain charm of colour, constitutes the beauty recognized by the eye, that in visible things, as indeed in all else, universally, the beautiful thing is essentially symmetrical, patterned."

This is the academic approach. Plotinus rejects it.

Things need not be symmetrical to be beautiful. Sunlight is beautiful, single notes of music are beautiful, points of abstract thought are beautiful. Where is the symmetry?

To find out what constitutes beauty Plotinus suggests we
5. go back to the source and indicate the Principle that bestows beauty on material things."

Material beauty comes into being by sharing in a Logos or Reason-Principle which comes from the divine forms. Recognizing the real beauty involves recognizing a kinship with and affiliation to the Reason-Principle or Nous.

To see true beauty, to recognize this relationship, one must see with the inner-eye, with the soul and the mind, "instinct and brain". "Withdraw into yourself and look."

"The artist should paint not only what he sees before him, but also what he sees within him. If, however, he sees nothing within him, then he should refrain from painting what he sees before him. Otherwise his pictures will be like those folding screens behind which one expects to find only the sick or dead." - Caspar David Friedrich.⁶

Beauty is something imposed on matter in the same way, Plotinus points out, that form is imposed on his material by the artist.

⁷"Suppose two blocks of stone ... one is untouched by art; the other has been minutely wrought ... into some statue of god or man ... Now it must be seen that the stone ... is beautiful not as stone - but in virtue of the Form or Idea introduced by the art. Art then is the seat and source of that beauty."

In the same way there is a seat and source of the beauty found in all natural things. To obtain knowledge and understanding of that source should be the artist's concern.

⁸"Still the arts are not to be alighted on the ground that they create by imitation of natural objects; for to begin with these natural objects are themselves imitations; then we must realize that they give no bare reproduction of the thing seen but go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives ... Thus Pheidias wrought the Zeus upon no model among things of sense but by apprehending what form Zeus must take if he chose to become manifest to sight."

Beauty in art and in nature is not limited to physical exteriors. Activities which concern themselves purely with imitating nature on the superficial level are not concerned with true inner beauty and are not art. Pop's commercial images and Impressionism's scientific images are merely "bare reproductions of the thing seen". They do not "go back to the Reason-Principles from which Nature itself derives." They do not make use of the inner-eye. They do not reach any true knowledge and understanding.

⁹"The Nature, then, which creates things so lovely must be itself of a far earlier beauty; we, undisciplined in the discernment of the inward, knowing nothing of it, run after the outer, never understanding that it is the inner which stirs us; we are in the case of one who sees his own reflection but not realizing whence it comes, goes in pursuit of it." Such is the futility of much so-called art.

To avoid this futility the artist ¹⁰must be drawn by tone, rhythm and design in things of sense; he must learn to distinguish the material forms from the Authentic-Existent which is the source of all these correspondences and of the entire reasoned scheme in the work of art; he must be led to the Beauty that manifests itself through these forms; he must be shown that what ravished him was no other than the Harmony of the Intellectual world and the Beauty in that sphere, not some one shape of beauty but the All-Beauty, the Absolute Beauty; and the truths of philosophy must be implanted in him to lead him to faith in that which, unknowing it, he possesses within himself."

So the artist has access to the beauty of the world of Nous not only through nature but by looking within himself as well.

It appears that it is the Intellectual-Principle, or Nous, which bestows beauty on material things. But we have still not gone to the ultimate source of beauty. "The Intellectual-Principle is not the ultimate. Not all things look to it but all things do look to the Good."

¹¹"The Good comes before all reason. And in any striving towards life and continuity of existence and activity the object is aimed at not as Intellectual Principle but as Good, as rising from Good and leading to it : life itself is desirable only in view of Good."

The Beauty of Nous comes from the Good. Therefore all beauty comes ultimately from the Good. Things become objects of desire because of what they take from the Good.

¹²"Earthly love is not for the material form but for the Beauty manifested upon it. Everyone of these Beings exists for itself but becomes an object of desire by the colour cast upon it from the Good ... The Soul taking that outflow from the divine is stirred; seized with a Bacchic Passion, goaded by these goads, it becomes Love. Before that, even Intellectual-Principle with all its loveliness did not stir the Soul; for that beauty is dead before it take the light of the Good."

Beauty is dead before it takes the light of the Good. So if the Artist wishes to bring beauty to life he must introduce the light of the Good.

13. "We have to recognize that beauty is that which irradiates symmetry rather than symmetry itself and is that which truly calls out our love Why are the most living portraits the most beautiful even though the other happen to be more symmetric? Why is the living ugly more attractive than the sculptured handsome? It is that one is more nearly what we are looking for, and this because there is Soul there, because there is more of the Idea of the Good, because there is some glow of the light of the Good and this illumination awakes and lifts the soul and all that goes with it, so that the whole man is won over to goodness and in the fullest measure stirred to life."

It is life, not matter, that is beautiful. The most 'living' works of art are the most beautiful. A fact which Egyptian Art makes clear.

14. "For the Egyptian craftsman did not create a form because he wanted it to be beautiful, to be only a pleasure to the eye. He gave 'life' to it because it had to serve a precise cause And because he made it true to life, because in the simplicity and limpidity of his ardour he made it serve truth, because in doing so he seized a universal law, he rendered a complete and harmonious world, he created the masterpiece, the treasure of beauty which attains the highest reach of art."

Beauty is not symmetry, not accepted canons, not academicism, not purely material. Matter is nothing without the life of soul. Matter cannot be beautiful without the life of soul, which comes from the Intellectual-principle and ultimately from the Good.

Beauty comes from life and is life. Art should be a reflection of that Beauty, a probing beyond the material. Art must live and give life.

V. Sight of the Mind

"True sight is of the mind. We would not see unless the mind was working." - Henry Millar.

Sight for Plotinus involves something more than a passive acceptance of what the eye is presented with. A passive acceptance can only result in 'impressions' which go no further than surface reality and show an obvious lack of understanding concerning the thing seen as well as the true nature of perception.

Seeing involves the mind and the ability to form judgments on what is seen as well as the ability to retain what is seen. Plotinus in his discussion entitled 'Perception and Memory' gives a knowledgeable explanation :

¹"Perceptions are not imprints ... are not to be thought of as seal-impressions on soul or mind."

"In any perception we attain by sight the object is grasped there where it lies ... the mind looks outward ... and takes no inner imprint It (the mind) includes with the object the interval for it tells at what distance the vision takes place ... if to see is to accept imprints of the objects of our vision we can never see these objects themselves; we see only vestiges they leave within us, shadows And for a conclusive consideration, we cannot see if the living object is in contact with the eye; we must look from a certain

distance For vision demands a duality of seen and seeing; the seeing agent must be distinct and act upon an impression outside it, not upon one occupying the same point with it : sight can only deal with an object not inset but outlying."

The mind does not accept impressions passively but has to work to see. Seeing is active.

2nd The mind affirms something not contained within it : this is precisely the characteristic of a power - not to accept impression but, within its allotted sphere, to act."

3rd To take an imprint easily is to be yielding. An impression is something received passively; the strongest memory would then go with the least active nature. But what happens is the very reverse."

True sight involves the active use of the mind. This is why, as De Buffet says, "art addresses the mind and not the eyes."

So-called art which addresses the eyes only will arrive at nothing but "impressions", beautiful 'scenes', 'views' or 'pretty pictures' - pretty mindless pictures.

Sight should be used to gain knowledge and experience of the thing seen. The best way to paint a mountain is to climb around on it, gain first-hand knowledge of what it is like. One must become totally absorbed in ones environment and not look at it in terms of a 'good view'.

⁴"Who would not rather walk ten miles across country (yes, ten miles my friend) and use his eyes, nose and muscles, than possess ten thousand Impressionist oil paintings of the country side?" - Synclian Lewis.

The best way to paint anything is to climb around in it first - be it physically or mentally i.e. using the mind's eye. No amount of photographic or scientific impressions will give a true knowledge of form. Knowledge comes from experience. To paint a thing knowledgeably one must have some experience of or with it. And one can experience an object merely by looking at it providing the mind is used to its full capacity. This involves setting up a communication with the seen object.

In fact, to gain true knowledge and experience of an object one has to actually become that object in a sense. "Being and knowing are identical." The seer must be able to identify with the seen object.

⁵"To any vision must be brought an eye adapted to what is to be seen, and having some likeness to it. Never did eye see the sun unless it had first become sunlike."

⁶"In proportion to the truth with which the knowing faculty knows, it comes to identification with the object of its knowledge."

This knowledgeable identification, which is the concern of art, can be compared to the approach of primitive hunters towards their prey. By taking on the identity and consciousness of the animal being hunted they were able to anticipate its moves.

In the same way the artist must be able to take on the consciousness of the objects he is concerned with in order to understand them more fully.

VI. Nature, Contemplation and Art

"Whether he likes it or not, man is the instrument of nature. It forces on him its character and appearance ..." - Picasso.¹

"Creation works ceaselessly through man. But man does not create, he discovers. Those who seek out the laws of nature as support for their new work collaborate with the Creator. Those who copy are not collaborators. For this reason, originality consists in returning to the origin." - Antonio Gaudi.²

Plotinus draws a parallel between the creativity of the arts and that of nature.

³"In the case of workers in such arts there must be something locked up within themselves ... guiding their hands in all their creation; and this observation should have indicated a similar phenomenon in nature; ... this indwelling efficacy must exist in Nature no less than in the craftsman."

He goes on to explain how and why Nature creates :

⁴"That which produces in the created realm is the living Reason-Principle Nature's creative act is simply the possession of its own characteristic Essence." Its essence, which is a Reason-Principle is "at once an act of contemplation and an object of contemplation."



Plotinus puts forward that if Nature was asked how it created it would answer as follows :

5, "It would have been more becoming to put no question but to learn in silence just as I myself am silent and make no habit of talking. And what is your lesson? This; that whatsoever comes into being is my vision, seen in my silence, the vision that belongs to my character The mathematicians from their vision draw their figures ; but I draw nothing ; I gaze and the figures of the material world take being as if they fell from my contemplation. As with my mother (the All-Soul) and the Beings that beget me so it is with me : they are born of a Contemplation and my birth is from the , not by their Act but by their Being; they are the loftier Reason-Principles, they contemplate themselves and I am born."

So nature is a Soul which creates by virtue of its contemplation. Therefor if man is to create in a similar way his mind and soul must be engaged in contemplation.

Creativity is an active thing. Yes, but ⁶"Action is set towards contemplation of an object of contemplation, so that even those whos life is in doing have seeing as their object ... We act for the sake of some good; this means not for something to remain outside ourselves ... but that we may hold the good of the action. And hold it where? Where but in the mind ... Thus once more, action is brought back to contemplation."

So if creativity involves contemplation, what does contemplation involve? It involves extending oneself out of oneself in order to gain knowledge of the outside world and then returning inward in order to consolidate the knowledge gained. This ability to 'go out of oneself' is essential to art.

⁷"The Soul has greater content than Nature has and therefore it is more tranquil, more nearly complete ... more contemplative. It ... is all the more eager to penetrate the object of contemplation and it seeks the vision that comes by observation. It leaves its native realm and busies itself elsewhere; then it returns and it possesses its vision by means of that phase of itself from which it parted."

⁸"The creative powers operate not for the sake of creation and action but in order to produce an object of vision. The same vision is the ultimate purpose of all the acts of the mind and ... of all sensation, since sensation also is an effort towards knowledge."

Art should be an effort towards knowledge. Art should not create for the mere sake of creating. Thus art for art's sake is non-art.

If the artist lacks in contemplation, in higher vision, his work will show it.

⁹"Everywhere we shall find that making and action are either a weakening or consequence of contemplation. A weakening if the doer or maker had nothing in view beyond the thing done; a consequence if he had another prior object of contemplation better than what he made."

Anyone who merely copies nature shows a weakening of contemplation whereas art is a consequence of contemplation.

¹⁰"The first reason for not imitating nature is that you cannot convey the emotion you receive at the contact of Nature by receiving her but only by becoming her. To sit down and copy a person or scene with scientific exactitude is an absurd and gloomy waste of time." - Wyndham Lewis.

The origin of all things is a contemplation. Art, through contemplation, returns to the origin.

VII. Magical Images

As has been said, true sight involves a switching of conscioussnesses. If this 'becoming the object' leads to the making of an image of it, that image will have special properties. The image will be more than just a copy, more than an impression - it will be a sort of 'magical image'. If the image contains all the information that can be gained from the original it will provide others with the opportunity to know all about the original through the image.

¹The book 'The Morning of the Magicians' contains an interesting discussion on the subject.

"How does the brain normally work? It functions like an arithmetical binary machine : Yes, No, Agreed, Not Agreed, True, False ... In the binary field our brain is unbeatable.

"What is an arithmetical electronic machine? ... It imitates (at high speed) the way in which our brain works. Man classifies; it's his privilege. All sciences depend on some system of classification.

"Yes, but now there are electronic machines which function, not only arithmetically, but by analogy. For example: if you want to study all the conditions which would affect the resistance of the dam you are building, you make a model of the dam. On which you carry out every possible test. You then provide the machine with your results. It co-ordinates and compares these data with inhuman speed, establishes all the possible connections ... and then tells you:

'Unless you reinforce the props of the third pier on the right, it will collapse in 1984.'

"The analogical machine ... has seen the present in all its aspects as a whole, while establishing ... all possible connections between every separate factor; and at the same time, it has seen into the future. In a word it has advanced from know-how to knowledge."

Plotinus draws the same distinction between know-how and knowledge :

²"To reason is like playing the cithara for the sake of achieving the art, like practising with a view to mastery, like learning that aims at knowing. What reasoners seek the wise hold."

He also talks of a knowledge of the future.

"Again, if the leading principle of the universe knows the future - as it must - then obviously it will know by what means the future is to come about And of course this knowledge of the things to come ... is that of the actual causing principles holding the certainty that the thing will exist The knowledge of future things is identical with that of the present."

³The authors of "Morning of the Magicians" believe "that the human brain also can, in certain circumstances, function like an analogical machine. That is to say it should be able :

- a) to assemble everything possible that can be observed about a thing;

- b) Draw up a list of constant relationships between the manifold aspects of an object;
- c) Become, in a sense, the thing itself; assimilate its essence and discover everything about its future destiny.

"All this ... at electronic speed. This fabulous series of exact mathematical operations is what we sometimes call ... an 'illumination'.

"If the brain can function like an analogical machine, it can also, like the machine work ... on a model of the thing. Not on God himself but on an idol In other words it should be able ... to see in an image serving as a model, in the words of Blake : 'The Universe in a grain of sand, and eternity in an hour.'

"If that could happen; ... then all magic would be explained. After observing a star with the naked eye, a Maya Priest would have been able to recompose in his brain the whole solar system...

"In a cruder sphere of imitative magic, we should understand how the Cromagnon magician looking in his cave at a picture of a ceremonial bison was able to comprehend the laws that governed the bison world and announce ... the conditions that would be most favourable for the next hunt."

The scientists have made these 'fantastic' analogical machines yet they refuse to believe that "what man has made he can also be."

Man is losing, perhaps has lost, the ability to use his mind in this way.

Plotinus, centuries before the invention of these machines, knew that the brain could function in this way. But what scientist today would take note?

Plotinus believed that every thing in this world is but an image of the archetypes contained in the Intellectual Realm and by contemplating these images man is able to come to knowledge of the true reality. Similarly anyone looking at an image made by a man who has knowledge of the Nous will also be able to come by this knowledge. This is why initiates of the ancient religions were made to contemplate idols which enabled them to gain insight into the nature of the All.

⁴"I think that those ancient sages, who sought to secure the presence of divine beings by the erection of shrines and statues, showed insight into the nature of the All; they perceived that, though this Soul is everywhere tractable, its presence will be secured all the more readily when an appropriate receptacle is elaborated, a place especially capable of receiving some portion or phase of it, something reproducing it, or representing it and serving like a mirror to catch an image of it."

These shrines and statues are, in a way, like the model of the man. Through them it is possible to gain knowledge of God, of the All-soul, just as through the model it is possible to gain knowledge of the real man.

This is art's purpose : to construct or make something which is capable of leading one to a greater reality. Science tries to do it with machines and forgets that man has been doing it ever since time began. Art has not forgotten.

The artist makes use of the 'magic mind'. His approach is identical to that of the magician and similar to, but better than, that of the analogical machine.

According to Plotinus the 'reigning sympathy' in the universe and the fact that in nature there is an agreement of like forces and opposition of unlike forces, is the explanation of magic. "The true magic is the friendship and strife which exist within the all."

The Magician draws on these patterns of power, and by ranging himself also into the pattern is able tranquilly to possess himself of these forces with whose nature and purpose he has become identified. Supposing the mage to stand outside the All, his evocations and invocations would no longer avail to draw up or to call down; but as things are he operates from no outside standground, he pulls knowing the pull of everything towards any other thing in the living system."

So too the artist operates from within the living system, being part of it he has access to every other part of it as well. Thus he is able to make magical images - works of art.

VIII. The Wisdom of Art

Art is knowledge, not know-how.

¹"All that comes to be, work of nature or of craft, some wisdom has made: everywhere a wisdom presides at a making.

"No doubt the wisdom of the artist may be the guide of the work; it is sufficient explanation of the wisdom exhibited in the arts; but the artist himself goes back, after all, to that wisdom in Nature which is embodied in himself; and this is not a wisdom built up of theorems but one totality, not a wisdom consisting of manifold detail co-ordinated into a unity but rather a unity working out into detail."

The ultimate wisdom from which all creation flows does not reason discursively. It does not plan its creation part by part. It does not think in the normal sense of the word, rather it is thought. This wisdom is the source of everything and contains everything, all knowledge, all wisdom in its entirety.

It is this totality of knowledge which the artist goes back to. Art is concerned with a self-contained and immediate knowledge which is superior to all other kinds of knowledge. This explains the superiority of the visual image over the verbal.

Plotinus quotes the writing of ancient Egypt as an example :

²"... The wise of Egypt - whether in precise knowledge or by native intuition - indicated the truth where, in their effort towards philosophical statement, they left aside the writing forms that take in the detail of words and sentences - those characters that represent sounds and convey the propositions of reasoning - and drew pictures instead, engraving in the temple - inscriptions a separate image for every separate item : thus they exhibited the absence of discursiveness in the Intellectual Realm."

The Egyptians developed writing as an art form. Writing today is not art. With its emphasis on grammar, structure and discursive reasoning it loses sight of the totality.

³"For each manifestation of knowledge and wisdom is a distinct image, an object in itself, an immediate unity, not an aggregate of discursive reasoning and detailed willing."

Literature can easily become all know-how and very little knowledge. In fact any art form which relies on theorems and ways of doing things falls into the same category.

IX. Plotinus and the Technological Age

The ideas of Plotinus correspond to those held by thinkers and artists of the ancient civilizations like the Egyptians, early Greeks and Etruscans. In their closeness to nature they developed a deep understanding of man and the forces that govern his universe. There was knowledge in the true sense of the word and not merely know-how.

Plotinus reflects those ages when more emphasis was placed on the spiritual than the material, ages when men could be individuals and live according to the laws of nature.

In an age where men are judged by the money they earn, the clothes they wear, the cars they drive; where beauty is only skin deep and can be bought at the cosmetics counter; where religion is reduced to a social occasion; where churches are places to be seen and show off your new hat; where trees are ripped down to make way for the construction of monstrosities (progress); where these monstrosities are decorated with bill-boards telling you that "Life is great" (when you know it stinks); - what place is there for art? And I mean real art - not that which goes by the name of art and is judged by its monetary value.

The truth is that there is no place for art in such a society. Art has nothing to do with society, least of all the present one.

What a man creates will always be a reflection of his attitude to life. If he lives a systematised, pre-packaged, production-line existence, man's attempt at art (if any) will be governed by the same adjectives. The artist must be a living person, not a technical, robot-like 'machine' who exists rather than lives.

Modern society forces art underground. True art is produced only by those individuals who choose to opt out of the technological age and reject its materialistic values; who understand and cling to what is left of nature. The values and philosophies found in the writings of Plotinus are still alive in these individuals. They are the true artists.

FOOTNOTES

I

1. Edward Lucie-Smith; *Symbolist Art*; Thames and Hudson England p.34.
2. Plotinus, *The Enneads*; Translated by Stephan MacKenna; Faber and Faber Ltd., London (1969) p.7.
3. *Ibid.*, p.10.
4. *Ibid.*, p.12.

II

1. A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, p.5^o.
2. *Ibid.*, p.117.
3. *Ibid.*, p.121.

III

1. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, *ibid.*; p.130.
2. Peter and Linda Murray; *Dictionary of Art and Artists*; Penguin (1971), p.303.
3. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, *ibid.*, p.130.
- 4,5,6,7. *Ibid.*, p.131.
- 8,9. *Ibid.*, p.130.
- 10,11,12. *Dictionary of Art and Artists*, *ibid.*, p.303.
13. Prof. Bradshaw, *Philosophy of Art Lecture*, 24 May 1974.
14. Andre Grabar; *Byzantium*; Thames and Hudson (1966) pp.219, 220.
15. David Talbot Rice; *Art of the Byzantine Era*; Thames and Hudson (1963); p.7.

IV

1. Picasso on Art, A Selection of Views, Dore Ashton p.73.
2. Louis Pauwels and Jaques Bergier; The Morning of the Magicians; Mayflower (1973) p.99.
3. Wyndham Lewis on Art, Ed. Walter Michel and C.J. Fox, Thames and Hudson, p.25.
4. Plotinus, The Enneads, *ibid.*, p.56.
5. *Ibid.*, p.57.
6. Helmut Brsch-Supan; Caspar David Friedrich, Thames and Hudson (1973); p.7.
- 7,8. Plotinus, The Enneads, *ibid.*, p.422.
9. *Ibid.*, p.423.
10. *Ibid.*, p.37.
11. *Ibid.*, p.573.
- 12,13. *Ibid.*, p.579.
14. Jean Yoyotte; The Treasures of the Pharaohs; Skirra (1969); Intro. p.x.

V.

1. Plotinus, The Enneads, *ibid.*, p.338.
2. *Ibid.*, p.339.
3. *Ibid.*, p.341.
4. Wyndham Lewis, *ibid.*, p.34.
5. Plotinus, The Enneads, *ibid.*, p.64.
6. *Ibid.*, p.244.

VI

1. Picasso on Art, *ibid.*, p.9.
2. E. Casanellis; Antonio Gaudi - A Reappraisal; Studio Vista Ltd., London (1967), p.103.
- 3,4. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, *ibid.*, p.239.
5. *Ibid.*, p.241.
6. *Ibid.*, p.243.
7. *Ibid.*, p.244.
8. *Ibid.*, p.245.
9. A.H. Armstrong, *Plotinus*, *ibid.*, p.102.
10. Wyndham Lewis, *ibid.*, p.72.

VII

1. Pauwels & Bergier, *ibid.*, pp. 238-239.
2. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, *ibid.*, p.296.
3. Pauwels & Bergier, *ibid.*, pp. 239-240.
4. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, *ibid.*, p.270.
5. *Ibid.*, p.323.

VIII

1. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, *ibid.*, p.426.
- 2,3. *Ibid.*, p.427.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Armstrong, A.H.; Plotinus; George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London.
- Börsch-Supan, Helmut; Caspar David Frederick; Thames and Hudson (1973).
- Bradshaw, Prof. B.; Philosophy of Art Lectures 1974, 1975.
- Casanellis, E.; Antonio-Gaudi - A Reappraisal; Studio Vista Ltd., London (1967).
- Fischer, Ernst; The Necessity of Art; Penguin (1971).
- Grabar, Andre.; Byzantium; Thames and Hudson (1966).
- Grant, Michael (Ed.); Greek Literature in Translation; Penguin Books (1973).
- Guthrie, W.K.C.; The Greek Philosophers; Methuen & Co. Ltd., London (1953).
- Happold, F.C.; Mysticism; Penguin Books (1973).
- Michel, Walter and Fox, C.J. (Ed.); Wyndham Lewis on Art; Thames and Hudson.
- Murray, Peter and Linda; A Dictionary of Art and Artists; Penguin (1971).
- Pauwels, Louis and Bergier, Jaques; The Morning of the Magicians; Mayflower Books (1973).
- Picasso on Art; A Selection of views; Dore Ashton.
- Plotinus, The Enneads; Translated by Stephan MacKenna; Faber and Faber Ltd., London (1969).
- Sorell, Walter; The Duality of Vision; Thames and Hudson, London.
- Yoyotte, Jean; The Treasures of the Pharaohs; Skirra (1968).

