AN ENQUIRY INTO SOME PRESENT-DAY ATTITUDES IN ART EDUCATION AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE CURRENT ALIENATION OF ARTIST FROM SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

"We can't teach these kids anything, man, they are so pure and unspoiled. Anything we show them or any discipline we impose upon them will only corrupt their purity. It's best if they just stay home and do their own thing."[1] "If your instructor says he knows what art is, watch out."[2] These two statements, the first by an instructor at a prominent New York art school, the second by one of America's respected critics, are the sort of talk one might expect to hear at any gathering of the avent-garde. To hear them said in and about the art school puts things in a different light. They are indicative of the sort of thing that is preached and practised by a sufficient proportion of the art-educational force in the Western world to constitute a crisis unparalleled in the entire history of art education.

Unopposed, such views must rapidly spell death for the institution. They must also, if they reached the proportions their authors appear to hope for, ensure a universal visual illiteracy unequalled in any other age. Of course statements like this, archly delivered by the very people who would suffer the most immediate loss at their implementation, are not at all true reflections of the whole state of art education in our time, or those people would simply not be in a position to make them. There are a great many people in the profession who would wholeheartedly reject such statements, and this faction is by no means confined to the older members.

1,2. These remarks (he declined to name their authors) were quoted by Roy Carruthers in a talk held at Kent State University, published 20th Aug, 1979. Both were made during a seminar held, significantly, in an art school.

Nonetheless, this sort of talk is symptomatic of a pervasive negativism amongst art teachers, and of the general state of alienation from society in which the artist now finds himself. More and more the artist has become persuaded that he not only can, but should, operate in a sequestered state, and produce statements with no reference to a public, in a sort of take-it-or-leave-it stance which has reached absurd proportions. He has abandoned the ancient contract of art and forbidden his children to honour it on pain of ostracism. He consistently and petulantly blames society for the state of alienation in which our art languishes, and society consistently blames him for withdrawing from the contract. However much some of us may feel that both sides have in their way ceased to honour the contract, it should by now be clear that only the artist can make the positive moves necessary to reestablish it. For the great bulk of blame for this breakdown has shifted from the late nineteenth century audience and its institutions to the late twentieth century artist and his critics. The western pattern of institutionalised training for the artist has so far survived all assaults from within as well as from without. The buildings are still there, the funds to run them are still forthcoming, and even the students are still pouring in, despite the prevailing bankruptcy of the curriculum. But disaster cannot be far off. It is my hope in this essay to lend some clarity to the issues that must be faced if the tradition of institutionalised art education is to survive. I think it is important that it does survive, for it is difficult to conceive of a viable alternative which has the same potential, in the current situation, for promoting visual literacy and reversing the aesthetic impoverishment of our environment. These goals have become increasingly urgent under the multiple pressures of the tyrannical technology which is engulfing our culture, the consumerism and ever-present threat of transience which is transforming our ethical sensibilities, and the day by day crumbling of those certitudes which have made western culture possible, and whose custodial rôle until recently ensured its survival.

I shall endeavour to show that it is primarily upon the institutions of education in the arts that such salvation from the despair of illiteracy and bankruptcy depends, for the generation which now populates them must be the instruments of any positive change that can be made towards the vital reopening of dialogue and the averting of the final death of our culture.

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1. THE LEGACY OF THE MODERN MOVEMENT

We always knew, we young artists of the twentieth century, that our ends were fundamentally different from those of artists of any other age. We felt that this should be so, and it was something we accounted a privilege and accepted with gratitude while somehow feeling that we had helped, and were helping to bring it about. For many decades the schools that instructed us had been powerfully persuasive in instilling the sense that we and our predecessors had been party to the ultimate artistic adventure. Though some of us might have had misgivings from time to time, the whole thing was too convincing to be doubted for long. The concerns of the artist were so wonderfully enticing, in contrast, we believed, to the times when the artist was held in chains by the general concerns he had first to answer before he could sneak in anything of himself. Art was freed forever from the fetters of convention and social prescription, was at last free to be nothing but art. In this purified form it would at last perform the wonders that society had denied itself by insistence upon all those restrictions. L'art pour l'art at last. Previously artists were bound to illustrate the ideas imposed upon them in seemingly limitless reiteration. The artist was consistently barred from expressing himself in the full sense that we were now free to do; unbound by convention, unrestricted by bourgeois values, we were joyously aware that self-expression was our first and exhilarating duty. Art was no longer about religion or myth, art was about art, and although you did not come right out and say it until fairly late in this adventure, art was about 'me'. Any twinges of panic, any flicker of dismay at the extraordinary reticence that the rest of society displayed in showing any enthusiasm for this marvellous venture, was easily stifled by reminders that we were initiates and had a mission. We had only to call to mind the struggle of the fathers of the movement and then look at their present stature. After all, even we students soon came to see that the bourgeoisie nursed absurdly sentimental attachment to modes of expression quite irrelevant to the challenging climate of the twentieth century. Desperately naive as this all sounds, it is nonetheless the sort of arrogant nonsense that art students and great numbers of artists believed passionately for a good many years, forming a mutual admiration society second to none. Like some other forms of folie de grandeur it contained traces of a distorted truth. But the hard facts of the matter were very different, and I think that they should be examined carefully.

The ideas which artists of former times had to contend with were the great underpinning ideas of Western culture, firmly rooted in those common certitudes which we so mourn: the myths, the religions, the philosophies, the art forms that built it. The concepts that arose from this culture were common to great numbers of people at any given time, and were continually tested and re-invested with originality by succeeding generations of artists in the great variety of art forms that we have inherited. Certainly the task of these artists was very different from ours: they had, on the one hand, the tested communicability of the underlying idea in terms of subject content (i.e. what the picture was of) and, on the other, sets of conventions and prescriptions which set boundaries in terms of formal content, to their apprehension of it. They were thus restricted to a readily readable format within which to construct personal readings of the phenomenology of the cultural tradition within which they worked, and of which they were a key part.

Yet were there not artists in their multitudes in almost any of the great periods of European history who produced distinctive readings of such apparently pre-ordained and convention-bound ideas? We would surely hasten to assert the supreme originality of Rembrandt's 'Prodigal Son', Caravaggio's 'Deposition' or Piero's 'Nativity'? The point is that the ideas such artists had were about something and the pictures they painted were of something. The fact that these artists presented readings of ideas that were innate in the cultural matrix of their times, and that they frequently worked well within established canons and conventions does not lead us to look upon them as any the less original or individual for that; rather the reverse. For it is often the measure of men like Giotto that they transcended such canons without rejecting them. The parallel content of mirrored reality often found ideal form in a fusing of idea with reflected fact, as in the bronze gods of classical Greece, in Poussin's Parnassus, or in van Eyck's painted paradise - the dream and the longing made extant in the perfected recreation of familiar form.

Echoes of ancient worlds awoke, and independent preoccupations evolved, other ideas, which in turn became elements in the immense cultural iconography of the West: the nude, the landscape, the portrait, each capable of infinite renewal in the evocation (by analogue, metaphor and the endless variety of sensual appeal) of their own kind of truth. A constant aspect of the dynamic art of the west is the fact that art generates and shapes more art.

> "The content includes readings of art as well as readings of reality - and by readings of reality I do not mean only the things of the everyday world, for the objects of aesthetic perception cross the boundaries of utilitarian

> object classification... It is thus arguable that the value of any overt subject in a work lies in its ability to bring alive in artist and reader an unfamiliar world of forms, a 'second nature'."[1]

Giorgione's 'Venus' projects chastity through sensuous delight; Ingres' 'Mme Moitessier' projects sensuality through classic formalism; Palmer's 'Harvest Moon' projects numinous awe through a delicate encompassing of nature.

To dispel any feeling that I cede to art anything less than a vitally positive rôle in the building of a culture, let me stress that the point about such ideas, enrichments though they may be seen to be of concepts all founded upon universal cognizance, is that they were part of an interaction between art and the common certitudes, each of which was vital to the survival of the other. Even the deviants, like Bosch or Fuseli or Klinger, while presenting bizarre or esoteric gnosis, indubitably spoke a language which could be read and pondered by their audience. Their works could be absorbed into the apperception of their culture, or could languish outside its discourse, perhaps to be valued by later generations. We have no reason to suppose that artists of earlier centuries were any less aware than we that to escape cliché art must challenge and hope to extend the prevailing visual language.

But when the young of those times set out to train for the arts they had in mind something very different from what we now propose; their first task was to become not only literate but highly articulate in this language. This involved de facto accession to considerable craftsmanship and profound understanding. By and large the student regarded his own personal intent and inclinations as a matter for when he set up on his own. Far from seeking to draw out the student's personality or individuality, the master's primary concern was with input which sought to bring alive the student's skill and intelligence. This was, quite simply, because the self-expression of the individual, the extent to which he outstripped the prevailing language, was looked upon by his master and society as a whole as the wine of the repast - that which lent the meal its ultimate savour, but which was never the whole explanation of the need to eat.

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[1] Philip Rawson: 'The Coarse Not & the Fine'. Encounter. April, 1981. p.58.

The impact these images made, the extent to which they nourished a culture, of course depended in great part upon what we should call originality, or it would not be possible to pick out with such ease a Goya or a Cezanne. But in every case the artists we value most were expressing themselves in a personal synthesis of the existing phenomenological data so profoundly individual, and for which there is no verbal substitute, that even centuries later we feel we know the man behind the image. What needs stressing is that they were expressing themselves about something communicable and inherently interesting to others. We may read the personality of a Velasquez in his portraits as surely as that of his sitter, though, and perhaps because, it was the personality of the sitter and its ennoblement that were his first concern, and which factors together act to make them great and original portraits.

The progress of art over the past half-century, influenced by whatever contingencies of modern life, has led us to regard the element of self-expression as that which should take first place and be most immediately apparent to all, in the creation of a work of art. Whether or not we agree that this is a valid belief (and the state of alienation between artist and society should give us pause) can we continue to believe that self-expression is art's sole purpose? For more and more, this is the aegis under which it is taught. And by self-expression we no longer mean what is set out above. For we are not required necessarily to express ourselves about anything external or even intelligible to others - we are only required to express our selves. Once it was given voice, this idea rapidly became fixed into what appears to be an indestructible canon, and an irremovable obsession. It has quickly and inevitably moved to simply exposing our selves, and, finally, displaying our selves. And that which bound art to society has been dissolved. The great ideas (that formed the very sinews of Western culture) have been dissipated and replaced with myriad fragments that speak to no common ideal and that promise no reconciliation with the human condition. We have passed the euphoric age when this was foolishly regarded as art's final triumph by everybody involved, and some of us have for some time recognised that attempts should be made to resolve this disastrous alienation. So far most of these have been futile evasions of the vital issues. Perhaps the most futile of all was to take our students out of the studio, the ultimate testing ground for artistic values, where the great ideas were given flesh, and drive them to study sociology, or psychology or political science* in vain attempts to create for our art 'issues' which will extract it from the egocentric pit - ineffectual grappling lines thrown across the widening gap. So far all this has patently failed to induce art to which our society can give its heart, and from which it can draw any nourishment at all.

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* Such studies may well be beneficial when added to the artist's training, but they can never be a substitute or alternative for any part of it.

Because it is the student's 'needs' that are now thought to be paramount, the overwhelming majority of contemporary art teaching founds its teaching policies upon the recognition that every student's needs are different. This understanding of the 'needs' of the student, so incomplete and yet so inextricably imbedded in the fabric of contemporary life, is one from which we shall escape with difficulty. It is the sort of cant which precludes very largely any understanding of the universally motivating 'general concerns' of other times. It condones visual illiteracy, and makes it hard for the student to see the point of literacy.

Courses are still set up in the traditional manner for groups of people - yet how can any one course be relevant to them all as individuals, if all their 'needs' are so different? The very idea of any significant group subscribing to any given body of belief is actively frustrated by the nature of the whole edifice of art training in our time, which for the past few decades has centred upon the apparently unassailable myth of the lonely genius. His talents buried in the anonymity of a more or less random assortment of individuals of differing interests and abilities will it is hoped, yet flower into genius. It is very largely to this that the system is still geared.

As the foregoing has attempted to show, there were, until comparatively recently, general concerns which, however they may have shifted in emphasis from time to time, formed the common ground between artist and audience on the one hand, and made such things as art courses feasible, on the other. As far as art schools are concerned the most radical breaks with tradition did not come in the early phases of the modern movement - far from it. It is already established as a cliché of traditionalist apology that men like Picasso and Matisse had their training in the traditional mode and that they were thus capable of visual experiment and essays into conceptual exploration that bore the mark of authority. But, cliché or not, this nonetheless contains truth, however popular it may be now to ignore it. More than this, Picasso's experiments throughout his life were still founded on known and tested subject matter, and it was his view of it that we valued. For, far from turning his back on nature, he formulated a visual language to deal with her in a progression of startlingly unfamiliar forms, each succeeding or failing in declaring its own truth. Each new turn in his oeuvre added to a visual grammar whose currency extended far beyond his own studio; each extended his premise for further ventures. Each new turn also ultimately frustrated the theorist in its capacity to surprise, its emergence from a realm of perception which finally has nothing to do with words, written or spoken. This is something the contemporary teachers have forgotten. They also overlook my other point: whatever our judgements on the formal or evocative content of a Picasso painting of, say, a woman, we should not have been able to make them in the first place if we did not both share his interest in the subject matter and apprehend his references to it.

We have come to expect the contemporary teacher to have nothing much to teach except his 'own thing', and that this become obsolete in its turn when he is no longer 'in touch'.

The sort of Socratic dialogue, which centres on propositions by the student, has long been an admissible part of art training. The other and greater part of teaching, until fairly recently, was the business of input from the teachers, without which they would have looked upon such dialogue as fairly pointless. Visitors to the contemporary school might be forgiven for concluding that such dialogue was the whole of education in art.

The major impediment to positive change in the current art-educational edifice is the fact that it is in the control of the avant-garde, bureaucratized. The teachers have dug themselves in on the unassailable premise that it is the students' 'thing' which will be explored. The idea of a course of study which seeks to familiarize one with a given body of knowledge has completely given way to a venture into self-exploration where the teacher takes on the rôle of a sort of highly paid tour guide. It is hardly surprising that this sort of thing fails to bridge the widening gap between the artist and his audience.

How is this dilemma to be resolved? For the system represents a seduction so powerful to students that it promises to remain entrenched for a long time. Can we expect that somehow the 'general concerns' of former times will reassert themselves? Will new bodies of belief evolve, out of this impasse, that might be expressible in an artistic language that elevates us above the mundanity, the fragmentariness, the ultimate silliness of so much of present-day artistic content? It is hard to see how, for feeble visual understanding has been generated by so much feeble art.

And yet there is a confluence of unexpected developments upon which art teachers might keep a sharp eye. For some years now, it has been becoming more and more difficult to ignore the growing incidence of students who approach the art school with the simple desire to paint pictures. They obstinately resist seduction into the many fanciful 'extensions' of the concept of art that now attempt to determine what they shall do in the art school. They either fight or they leave and try to find a school which can teach them what they want to know. They wish to explore art, not themselves; their interests stubbornly refuse to turn inward. They are not interested in searching for 'alternative approaches' or 'performing apart from historical precedent'. This student is not the eager novice of the sixties and seventies - he is critical of what he gets and sees that it is very little. He rejects the distortion of rôles which proposes the teacher as 'just another guy who is into art' but who nonetheless accepts position and payment in a teaching institution, while insisting that art cannot be taught. He is angry at the patronising attitude that is the only answer to his attempts to find someone who will teach him what he wants to know, and, in a direct contradiction of the modern school's declared philosophy, at the fact that he is the only one in the class who is not allowed to do his 'thing'. Of course he is not really a new breed. He has been there all along. There has begun, it seems, some subliminal and so far ill-defined shift in values which prompts him to unequivocal revolt and prevents him from taking refuge in the crafts and 'applied arts' into which so many of his kind until recently were successfully driven. This is one of the unexpected developments.

The other is the increasing boldness with which critics and others whose voices are respected in the sphere of the arts are proclaiming the end of the modern movement as we have known it. Modernism, they tell us, is dead. Many agree that this has come about so suddenly because of the increasingly incestuous nature of modern artistic discourse. Others suggest, not unconvincingly, that this is the logical outcome of the movement whose seeds were sown by Romanticism. However this may be, much of what has seemed so convincing for three quarters of a century appears to be losing its grip and is suddenly up for reappraisal. Most stupefying to the art world at large, and most unnerving for the art-teaching world in particular, is the suggestion that their absolute identification of art with modernism is open to question. The mounting evidence indicates a pervasive rejection of 'art as revolution' and hints at a turn toward art as reconciliation. From within the fashionable art world itself has come an extraordinary and quite unexpected beginning. A faction has moved away from the mainstream controlled by the avant-garde bureaucracy and answered a need cultured society seemed hardly aware that it had. By (perhaps unconsciously) aligning themselves with the tradition of realism which, Edward Lucie-Smith rightly points out[x], has never really been wholly interrupted, they have awakened a voracious hunger for realism - almost any kind of realism - that will promise something a little more than the cloying naturalism so dear to the philistines. The meretricious and often vulgar beginnings differ only in technique and subject matter from the superficial naturalism this public had learned to reject. But the evidence, both of the continuing development of this movement and of its immediate antecedents, is that this was merely a false dawn, which shows every sign of being followed by a real dawn. The immediate antecedents may be seen in the way the fashionable audience allowed artists like Hockney to first keep a foot in either camp, then move to presenting them with uncomplicated realism, even naturalism, which must have been greatly instrumental in popularising amongst the fashionable set the sort of representations they had learnt to associate exclusively with the art of the nostalgic past. The continuing development shows such interesting moves as the sudden attention paid to artists who have been ignored for most of their lives and who suddenly find themselves in fashion. Or the gradual emergence of a painter like Hopper, who could not be remotely likened to the bland photo-realists that started all the fuss, so that a prominent critic finds himself saying that this always rather low-key figure "is coming more and more to look like one of the pivotal figures in American 20th-century art."[1] The photo-realists, far from diverting public attention from the fact that their images consisted of blow-up photographs laboriously painted over, frustrated their critics by drawing upon the camp philosophy of the sixties, and directing attention to this as somehow the chief merit of what they made - that which prevented it from being mere realism. This sweetened the pill for the critics and doubting public alike and photo-realism was admitted to the big time. (If this had been the end of it, fears would have been allayed all round. But the seeds had been sown.) The elevation of a painter like Hopper puts things in a different light. His content is not smart at all; in fact it is homely, even sentimental at times. Yet this and other forms of uncomplicated picture-making are steadily moving into the field of vision and have to be taken account of. It has caused a profound polarisation amongst critics, dealers and patrons alike. All of this might have been predicted on the strength of the same hunger in the salerooms, where even the most insipidly naturalistic paintings and sculptures by Victorian artists are snapped up for huge prices by an apparently insatiable market. And works by painters like Geróme, Bierstadt, Moran, Church, to name a few of the most authoritative of those up for re-valuation, are well into the six-figure price range, which, barely a dozen years ago, could only be commanded by a Rembrandt or a Velasquez.

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[x] A Flow of Images. Edward Lucie-Smith. Encounter, April 1981 p.62.

What, so far, has been the reaction of the schools to all this? There is little to indicate that they will be able to cope with whatever change is wrought in their future student material by these developments. The evidence that they have heeded the warnings is not overwhelming, as I shall

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1. A Flow of Images. Edward Lucie-Smith. Encounter, April 1981 p.62.

try to show in those parts of this essay which deal with the difficulties faced by students who are looking for an alternative to the inherited prejudices of establishment modernism. What awaits the present-day student is not very compelling from the point of view of the seriously aspiring artist:

> "So far from being the heirs of the great Romantics - the Van Goghs of to-day - most successful gallery artists or fashionable designers are more like pop-stars, shot into the big time overnight as a result of a contribution just that bit more provocative on the surface, but in reality shallow and dull. When their glitter palls a little, they are dumped by the speculators and a new superstar is brought in. A confident art school system should have been able to challenge this febrile and destructive academicism."[1]

The truth is that the art schools are far from confident, and cannot challenge it. The interests vested in the systems of the art world as it now stands are colossal, and the following chapter undertakes to look criticially at some of them and will try to evaluate their contribution towards the present impasse as well as the extent to which we may expect anything positive towards its resolution from those who hold such interests. For with regard to dealers and critics in particular there are monstrous edifices of power to be protected. The polarization amongst the great names in criticism, where each is dismissive of what another sees in art, consistently evades the real purpose of such discourse, which is to find common ground - for art is there, no matter what is said about it. It is indeed hard to avoid the suspicion that common ground is the last thing

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1. Peter Lloyd Jones: Art Students and their troubles. Leonardo, Pergamon Press. Vol 8 No. 1 Winter 1975 p.63.

that these men (the critics, the dealers, the museum experts, even the teachers) really want, for confusion is their metier. The more confusion the greater their power or the bigger their profits or the more purposeful their lives, and in the case of the teachers, the more secure their position. Powerful critics benefit all too obviously from a visually impoverished culture which to a considerable extent their profession has helped to bring into being, for so frequently their citicism has generated an art from itself without any reference to a public. The schools and museums, those traditional guardians of quality, have joined the resulting internal debate at the expense of their charges, have abdicated their traditional rôles and so neglect their responsibility to foster the genuine and vital dialogue without which art soon comes to be regarded as a mere luxury.

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2. THE VESTED INTERESTS

(i) The Critics

The oracular status and extraordinary power of the successful modern critic is a source of both bewilderment and indignation to artist and layman. He is a social functionary whose presence is universally taken for granted. Any journal or newspaper of either a general or a 'cultural' nature would be considered remiss in failing to number a critic amongst the elite of its contributors. The multiplicity of art journals that appear all over the world count upon regular news and views from a proliferating body of such men. These contributors range from those we call 'art journalists' to those whose coin is the philosophy, the theory and the history of art, and who have produced an immense quantity of literature on the subject, some obscure, some widely read and influential. Every artist is all too aware of the perpetual hurdle of the 'review' which can make or break his career, and which poses constant constraints. The primary functions of the critic might be summed up as a) to promote a clearer understanding between artist and public and b) to instruct the artist by reminding him of standards toward which he ought to aspire. His critical assessment of the artist's work is deemed to fulfil both these functions. Both ideals are fraught with obvious difficulties. It might, for instance, be asked why the artist is so inarticulate as to need an interpreter, why his work cannot speak for itself. What is at issue here is not so much whether the work can speak for itself, but whether the audience, without some help, will necessarily appreciate all that is said. History has shown too clearly how many factors can and do hinder the process of communication between the artist and his public, how frequently the great artist has suffered neglect and even ostracism for reasons that seem incomprehensible to later generations, for this to be a serious question for very long. It is, hypothetically, perfectly conceivable that had he had the services of a sympathetic and sensitive critic, with the sort of influence we are inclined to resent in the powerful critics of today, Rembrandt would have led a very different life, and the cultural life of the Nétherlands at that time have been the richer for it. The answer to this hypothesis must in all conscience be, however, that Rembrandt, given wide recognition and the material success we now consider that he deserved, might not have developed into the Rembrandt we revere.

There is a parallel inference that cannot be ignored: the proliferation and status of critics in our time will suggest to future generations that the dialogue between artists and public is at an all-time low. That there has never been a time, given the possibilities of the modern audience in terms of education, leisure and affluence, when dialogue was potentially so universal and in reality so restricted. Which, in turn, must lead us to question the elements of money, leisure and learning as ingredients for successful dialogue.

The first objection to the second ideal must point to the glaring absence of agreement about what constitutes such standards, and the inherent impossibility of any reliable instructive benefit to the artist. Another objection might be to ask what it is that gives these exalted figures the stature they must surely require to judge and instruct a wide variety of personalities at work in a sphere of which, in most cases, the critic has no practical experience. There will be many artists who will argue that only a painter may with justification instruct an aspiring painter, and in the studio this argument deserves serious attention. But it is a restricted view which holds that there is nothing of value that the painter can learn from critical appraisal of his efforts by an outside sensibility. For it is, on one level, and amongst other things, an informed response from one generally considered to be the most receptive amongst his audience, and he ought to take account of it unless he is painting only to communicate with other painters. Bearing in mind the other function of the critic (to instruct the audience) the critic's point of view obviously need not at all represent that of the rest of the audience, though it is a foolish critic who reacts as though their opinion did not matter. If he does, and many do, he is abdicating at least a large part of his responsibility.

While in practice the critics can no more agree upon what we should expect of the artist than on the interpretation of what he produces, this common objection cannot either be held up as a reason for doing away with the critic or even for ignoring him. It can be argued that the critic, taken at his best, is a man with the capacity to illuminate, for the less experienced and the less perceptive, qualities that might otherwise have escaped them, and so promote communication. Because critics are themselves human, and are more than the mere sum of their acquired learning, we can expect a variety of insights from a variety of critics, all of which might be equally helpful. As in other spheres, debate and disagreement are essential to maintain a healthy body of criticism, to prevent the ossification of ideas and attitudes that have in the past caused the neglect and intolerance on the one hand, and the complacency on the other, which artists and critics alike should be at pains to avoid. The question to be asked is not, then, whether given good critics and a receptive public, critics can be useful, for there is every reason to suppose that they can. But rather, given the nature of many of our critics, and the circumstances as they really are, whether they are in fact useful, and how much attention they deserve from both the artist and their readers. In attempting to assess the critic's contribution to the pervasive confusion within the art world, and the breakdown of its dialogue with society, we have to ask what we should demand of a good critic, and how often, in fact, we get it.

What do we expect in a good critic? I think it should be something like this:

1. We should expect him to be knowledgeable about his subject. We should also expect him to be educated. It is perhaps important to distinguish between these two properties here.

One who is knowledgeable, as an artist ought to be about his art, need not necessarily be 'educated'. And even if he is, it is likely that he will be less educated than the critic, though by no means is this the rule. For his knowledge may well be inert, in the sense that it is primarily concerned with the 'how' and is not of the kind to induce any conscious degree of enquiry into or understanding of the 'why'. There are examples enough in the history of art to show that he will not thereby necessarily be an artist of no account.

Education, in the sense that we expect the critic to be educated, cannot be tied down to a specific competence. It is to the critic that the artist (and his public, for that matter) ought to be able to turn for enlightenment (perhaps a better word in this context than 'instruction') which in that sense may serve to 'educate' him; both the artist and the audience ought simultaneously to be able to rely upon the critic's knowledgeability in the sphere of art. So that prima facie the good critic has both these qualifications: his education has made him competent to pronounce on both the intrinsic and the extrinsic values implicit in the arts.

2. We should expect him to criticize, and without equivocation, on the basis of this education, in a manner intelligible to his readers. We expect from him more than a mere report on the one hand, and a great deal more than an expression of his preference on the other. In short, we expect responsibility toward both reader and artist. We expect responsibility in so far that when a critic can find nothing constructive to say, he should say it as briefly as possible. For if education involves intentional transmission of what is worthwhile, so should criticism, and critics should refrain from flights of fancy.

3. We should expect that the critic be articulate and literate in the sense that he is a good writer; that what he writes should provoke a reaction in the reader at least strong enough for him to wish to view the work himself. He should be able to interpret what he sees in creative writing, the sort that is seen at its best in the hands of a writer like Ruskin (who was not restricted to writing about art theory) where it will flourish the better as interpretative criticism "the more nearly one art (the art of words) is substituted for another (the art of plastic images)."[1]

4. He should be possessed of mature standards of criticism, which, while they allow him to take critical note of the vicissitudes of fashion, do not allow him to be seduced by them. At the same time he ought to be tolerant in the sense that he is open to fresh ideas and new viewpoints.

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[1] Herbert Read: Art & Alienation. Thames & Hudson, London 1967 p.9.

5. While he should display education in the sense that I have implied, and therefore be persistently watchful of extrinsic values, he should also be prepared to consider art first for its own value, and in particular to beware of coming to regard it as a means of demonstrating some philosophical or even political notion of his own.

6. His ambitions for himself, for his position as interpreter, should always take second place to his care for the health and advancement of the activity he sets out to evaluate, and in so doing, to influence.

7. Most important of all, he should be unflinchingly honest, for this is the key to most of the foregoing qualifications. There are, in fairness, a number of reasons why this is very hard: if he is writing in an art journal, his criticisms will appear in a publication whose editors will be reluctant to offend the dealers whose promotions are advertised on its pages. So the critic must frequently be tempted to appear to accord serious attention, at the very least, to shows which he in fact might find trivial, but which are held on the premises and at the financial risk of regular advertisers. If he wishes to rise to a position of influence (and if he cares about the arts and believes that his opinions can be valuable there is no reason to criticize him for this desire) he must either compete in the game, so dear to many influential critics, of discovering new directions, concocting new theories, and unearthing unsuspected genius, or find some other path to fame and influence. For the simple pursuit of truth is unlikely to gain him a wide readership. He must be honest about changing his mind, for this is something which is in store for any thinker who makes a living by disseminating his views. If it is evident that he does care, no reasonable man can take exception to this.

The particular relationship of artist to critic to public, that now seems fixed in an unbreakable pattern, appears to have had its origin in the Romantic movement. It seems to have been the theories of Ruskin that first underwrote the rôle of mystic for the artist that was engendered by this movement, and the stance of Romantic artists first suggested that interpreters were needed to transmit their meaning to those who wished to appreciate them.[*]

The fact that Ruskin's theories (such as the theory of the innocent eye) which gave rise to this allocation of rôles have since been replaced over and over again by others has not affected the attitudes (which have become fixed) and the rôle division (which has remained unchanged). Given the path of art since that time there has been every reason for the pattern to become indelibly fixed, and very little to challenge it. The critic has become an immovable object, firmly wedged between the artist and his audience. For the artist has in fact become less and less coherent, the audience, naturally enough, less and less receptive. It does not seem, on the face of it, that the proliferation of critics has done anything much to halt this process. On the contrary, it gives every indication of having hastened it. We have already noted that critics are human, and that this must be accounted a strength, for it accords them the individuality that is necessary for distinctive thought processes. But it would be naive to overlook it as a potential weakness. We have to remember that the critic is first a talker, rather than a doer, one who analyses the efforts of others, whatever distinctive theses he may build on his conclusions. Without artists there would be no critics. It might be instructive to ask ourselves what the motives are for setting out to become a critic, and indeed, how many did set out to become critics and how many merely ended up as critics.

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[*] Despite the enormous power he wielded, Ruskin cannot be likened to the powerful critics of today. He was one of the very few critics of any time unarguably qualified for the job. To put it crudely, Ruskin was in a strong position to criticize drawing, being himself a superlative draughtsman, not merely a man with a theory about drawing. He was also a great writer and profound thinker who gave equal importance to the condition of art and the condition of society. He was completely immune from any tendency towards refuge in an ivory tower, being a social critic of profound foresight, placing his evaluation of art squarely within its social context. This ability to measure the whole social process, coupled with his passionate care of the arts, sets him apart from most critics of any age.

At the bottom of the pile there is the critic who writes for the provincial newspaper. He might have any sort of origin. Very often he is an artist of sorts himself. Though there are some, there are very few artists, who are in any sense successful, who are inclined or suited to turn their energies to criticising the work of other artists. If the local critic is one who has ended up as such because he has failed to find fulfilment or success in the practice of his own art, he is unlikely to be a healthy candidate for criticising the work of those who have found it.

There are many critics on this level who have got in, as it were, through the back door. Those who are installed in that capacity on the strength of only the remotest connection with the arts. At best they will have a course in art history somewhere in their past, and at worst they might be writers for the social page, and move from covering exhibition openings to actually pronouncing upon the work displayed there.

Neither of these types, however, is in danger of influencing the course of art in any significant way, and even the local damage they do must be limited. But as we move away to the bigger centres where there is a bigger audience, where there are more artists and altogether a more active cultural environment, so the potential influence of the critic grows. Here we are less likely to encounter the back-door critics, though a little digging amongst the credentials of some of the critics of our bigger cities will show that such do make their appearance from time to time. The readership in the larger cities will automatically contain a more articulate critical element, and a higher standard will be expected - anyone wishing to pursue the career of a critic in such a centre will need to have a little more under his belt. And one has come across some extremely conscientious and responsible critics at this level. However, one will have more frequently to do with the type that, having ambitions towards influence, will have evolved an 'approach'. He will have read his Herbert Read, his Greenberg, his Steinberg. He is unlikely, however, to have the sort of education behind him that such men indubitably have, however one may on occasion be led to doubt it. I do not think it is cynical, but simply realistic, to suspect that persistent reading of the fashionable critics will produce, amongst other things, one overriding revelation: that the word, as well as serving its true function of communication, may as well be used as a refuge. The fact that the majority of critics on this level are unable themselves to grasp what is happening does not impede them from writing about it at length, and sounding as though they do. Thanks to a style of criticism evolved by their mentors, it is neither really necessary for them to understand, nor to make any real attempt to convey understanding to their readers. Instead they have built a wall of jargon about themselves and about the activities of their subjects, precisely to keep the layman out.

Robert Wraight, in his book 'The Art Game'*, raises a very significant point about the general failure of modern critics: they do not really criticise. They have retreated, most of them, into a deadpan earnestness, which is blandly applied to every fatuous manifestation of avant-garde trickery. The universal terror of being seen to be anything but absolutely modern and the nowadays very frequent problem of finding anything at all worthwhile to say, has caused them to pursue a policy of praising everything they see, either by implication in the seriousness which they accord such manifestations, or by flights of obscurantist hyperbole. The deliberate creation of obscurity is the surest weapon in this game. If the obscurity is deliberate, it is an offence against reason, and therefore against civilisation. If it is not deliberate, it is a sign of incapacity. Much of modern journalism is an unreadable blend of incapacity and deliberate obfuscation.

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* Published by Leslie Frewin, London 1965.

There is another tendency which is common to most critics above the provincial level, and which has its origins and its most pronounced expression at the top of the fashionable tree. This is the habit the fashionable critics, and many artists and art instructors with them, have of evaluating everything they see in terms of the modernist debate only, as though art was somehow expected to operate in a vacuum. The loudest voices amongst them persist in evaluating every new 'breakthrough' (itself a term badly in need of review) in terms of its relationship with the existing pantheon of the avant-garde alone. This incestuous debate has for far too long occupied the central place in art journalism, and is the most effective means yet evolved for stifling any dialogue between the artist and the public with which he would presumably, through the medium of such periodicals, like to communicate. The critic is seen here to be consciously erecting barriers to communication, to be actively working against the promotion of understanding for which his readers look to him.

There are some, amongst them Richard Cork in an encouraging editorial in Studio International (March/April 1976) who have for some time been issuing warnings about the consequences to be expected on this path. He asserted that the single most important challenge facing the art world of our time was the re-establishment of viable communication between the artist and society at large, a revival of the social function of art and art criticism. He insisted that if this challenge were not met, not only would our society grow rapidly the poorer for it, but the arts themselves, in ceasing to have any meaning in social terms, must fade forever into a miasma of self-obsession. One of the most obvious instances where this and related misdirection of the arts perpetually appear is in the setting up and adjudication of prestige competitions. First of all, the results of the competition can frequently be forecast with a depressing accuracy, once one knows who will be called in to judge the winners. Many critics have developed a reputation for 'backing' certain approaches and even styles to the exclusion of others. Very often it is a 'style' which they themselves were operative in establishing as important or noteworthy. If whoever is commissioned to set up such a competition is persuaded, for whatever reason, that the outcome should favour a certain type or style of art, he can choose his judges accordingly. In crude terms: if for some reason he wishes to promote non-figurative art, he will choose critic A; if he wishes to promote realism he will choose critic B, and so on. There are relatively few critics whose judgements, in this sense, are completely unpredictable. They may, of course, have cultivated a reputation for unpredictability as a subtler and longer-term way of ensuring their standing. Most of us will recognise the situation where a local competition is held and a 'big name' critic is invited to preside over the adjudication. His acceptance is usually looked upon as such a triumph that his fellow judges will be intimidated into an attitude of submission and compromise well before he arrives. If his reputation for unpredictability is what he is intent on boosting at that time, his judgements will be dictated by this consideration first. He will often make a choice calculated to be outrageous, to reduce his fellow-judges to nonplussed compliance on the one hand, and to ensure a lively press on the other. For he has learnt that contention in the press and an outraged reaction do far more for him than merely choosing the best work. He has also found that vox populi howling for his blood does much to persuade those others locked into that vacuum of specialised discourse that is his metier, that he is a force to be reckoned with. So that even this type of critic acts in a predictable fashion in some circumstances, in so far that he can be relied upon for maximum publicity. In some cases this is the first reason for inviting him.

In the thousands upon thousands of pages that are printed every month this discourse rambles on, with discussions at all levels of competence analysing the means that artists employ to give their ideas appropriate embodiment. Most of such discussion blandly overlooks the fact that means should have an end, and that "this end is inextricably bound up with art's responsibility to contact and nourish the wider audience it now ignores at its peril."[1]

Many of the greater names in art criticism give every appearance of being far more concerned with upstaging one another than with any real attempt to bring about the reconciliation that is so obviously needed. The artist should be wary of looking upon the critic as friend or ally, for

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1. Richard Cork. Editorial in Studio International, March/April 1976.

there is little to suggest that in the main the fashionable critic is concerned about artists as anything more than raw material for creations of his own, and in becoming himself the real star of the show.

As Tom Wolfe has so amply demonstrated* in these circumstances the artist may be effectively reduced to illustrating the theories cooked up by the critic. Frequently this is an artist the critic has 'discovered', and so the vicious circle closes.

On the lower level of competence that makes up the bulk of such journals, there is a sea of pseudo-intellectual porridge. At its most ambitious, writing at this level mimes the stance of the big names; but it is also frequently reduced to the kind of plodding reportage, enlivened by arch asides, of which the following provides a fairly typical example:

> "This installation was the most unified and accessible of Weiner's recent works. One of the three parts of the installation consisted of three pillars in the gallery having been painted black, white and red; this corresponded with the poster's somewhat arch reference to 'black, white and red all over' after the famous old riddle about newspapers. Next, around three walls of the gallery in red letters near the floor, were the phrases "with relation to the various manners of decoration (i.e. presentation)" "covered with red and green"; "painted with blue and puce"; "placed on yellow and red" and "all with a probability of being seen". The third part of the work consisted of the prescription "many coloured objects placed side by side to form a row of coloured objects" lettered in green across the north wall of the gallery at eye-level.
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> "The scale, position and general conspicuousness of all the separate parts of this installation gave them the

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* 'The Painted Word'. Bantam Books, New York 1976.

> unified feel of a highway sign system, even in their colour-coding. The compound ironies involved in the use of the structural elements of the gallery's architecture to represent (not illustrate) a riddle about a mode of information, in contrast with the bold lettered messages which were in fact objects that described their own structure and abstract features, offered intriguing avenues of access unavailable in Weiner's previous work. Weiner thus seems increasingly concerned with the relationship between humans and objects within Western culture. This latest installation was as challenging as his previous ones but considerably more involving. Factors in this were color, scale and the evident wit."[1]

And so on for some considerable length. Like other articles of this nature, it is accompanied by photographs which instantly and clearly convey all the information which the 'critic' has so doggedly set out in print. The question that arises in the reader's mind, if he has managed to read all this, is not "What does he mean?", for it is clear that he does not mean anything at all, but rather "Is he serious?" - and one suspects that the answer to that is probably that he is not, and that this does not much matter for his editors do not seriously expect any readers. This is the kind of wadding that makes up the copy-space between their lucrative advertisements and the kind of serious article that will be found on the next page: a review of the big Chardin retrospective then on show at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. It, too, is a fairly representative article of its kind. It is concise, illuminating and scholarly. The same periodical then, and in this it presumably represents its readership, clearly expects something quite

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1. Paul Stimson, in Art in America "Between the Signs". Oct 1979.

different from its writers when they are faced with an exhibition of this sort. Yet both set out to appraise exhibitions of art. There are obvious reasons for this. The critic who sets about Chardin is up against a consensus of scholarly opinion. The critic who is talking about men like Larry Weiner has carte blanche, for few will trouble to call his judgements into question, not least because few will read them. It is significant that the most articulate voices that have been issuing warnings about the state of involuted egocentricity in the arts have, almost without exception, come from outside the walls.

There is also a rising tide of vociferous dissent from the growing body of students and recent ex-students, frustrated and trapped by the limitations imposed upon them by this system (which favours the critics) of passing on to each new wave prejudices which entrench an old boys' network in the colleges and galleries of the art world quite as iniquitous as any that existed within the art establishments of former times.

In conclusion, it must by now have been recognised by a good many people that the greater body of criticism has failed in what should have been its real objectives: It has emphatically failed to illuminate the processes of art for the layman; it has instead confounded and repelled him even more than the art it evaluates. Where it should have served to inspire and direct the energies of the growing artist, it has led him into a maze. Finally, it has helped drive the arts into a state of alienation from which there seems little real hope of return.

(ii) The Rôle of the Museum

The museum has, for better or worse, become an immovable institution integral to the structure of the art world. Also, for better or worse, it has in many instances become divided into distinct parts. In many of the major centres of western culture, such as Paris, London, New York, these parts have become independent of one another, so that the archaeological museum, the 'old master' museum, and the museum of modern art may be housed in independent buildings, under independent control and independent funding. Some might argue that this constitutes a failure by the institution in its educational rôle. Certainly the layman, when visiting these centres, must approach the contents of these divorced parts with quite distinct expectations. In the same way he has learned to select particular periodicals and expects to encounter distinct literary styles in pursuit of these now distinct interests. The layman who has become accustomed to this convention may be either alarmed or delighted by the many smaller or provincial museums where works from widely divergent periods and cultures happily vie for his attention. Of course there are major museums where such variety may be encountered, but by and large our attitude has caused us at the very least to divide these into rooms devoted to particular periods. And there is a great deal to be said for such ordering of our sensibilities. However this may be, it does strike one that it is so often between the art of our own time and that of the 'old masters' that the distinction is most clearly made, and there cannot be many historians who would not instantly provide excellent arguments to support such division. We have for so long accepted their status in this matter that we should not easily oppose them. There is, however, another point of view than the art-historical, and I think it deserves consideration.

It might be argued that the artist whose work is accorded a place alongisde a Khmer bronze or a Baroque altarpiece would find himself very effectively reminded that while life is short, art should be long. That both he and his audience might gain a healthier critical perspective of his work than if it remains sequestered from the art of other times and places. Thus it might be instructive to the artist, to the layman, and to the critic to take Andre's 'Firebrick Construction' out of the Tate for a year, and put it in the Ashmolean. It is hard to see how the historian could object to this, as such juxtaposition must illuminate history more clearly than if the work is forever cloistered amongst its peers.

The museum of 'modern' art is inevitably destined to become increasingly a museum of 'period' art, however fantastic its rate of expansion, in a way in which the provincial museum is not. In time we must come to view it in much the same way that we view the archaeological museum. For, given the mercurial and essentially fickle nature of the process of our art, that will be the only function left to it.

Despite the contradiction inherent in this development, and the concern it is causing to at least some of the controlling authorities, there seems little hope of any fundamental change in the attitudes that have brought this about. Be this as it may, we still have to ask whether the museum of art, divided or not, is an institution which functions in a manner as beneficial to the culture of our time as we generally suppose. The museum of art, whatever its form, is as a rule nationally or municipally endowed. The experts that are appointed to control it are so appointed on the assumption that they know better than we what is good for us and therefore what is worthy of the costly business of installation and preservation in a museum. And in principle, the presence of experts is just as well. Just as the public library cannot base its selection of books on the common denominator of taste (or it would be flooded with hospital drama and westerns) the museum in part justifies its endowment by its educational rôle. In disregarding that rôle it does its public a disservice. Equally, however, no library could effectively fulfil its educational rôle if it offered exclusively books that only a small minority of the borrowers wished to read or could understand. For its task is, as much as anything else, to engage public taste in worthwhile literature - it would have to aim at offering the best of popular literature alongside that calculated for more sophisticated tastes, which is in fact what most public libraries do. A few years ago Edward Lucie-Smith made the interesting observation that the Tate, at that time, had no example of 'super-realism', and seemed reluctant to acquire, for example, a Richard Estes. For, apart from the expense, he remarked "the public has made the reputation of the style, not the theoreticians."[1]

The implication is that the theoreticians (by which one presumes him to mean the big names in art criticism) had been caught napping, or were merely nonplussed, and failed to apply the necessary pressure to the experts that control the museums - were instead maintaining a judicious aloofness. And it does suggest that the 'experts' are no longer capable of making any move without the tacit approval of the theoreticians. Apart from revealing yet another province in the critics' empire, this is an admission of some magnitude. Its author is a theoretician of long standing, and was for some time connected with a major London gallery.[*] In 1972 there occurred the now notorious purchase by the Tate Gallery of the firebrick construction by Carl Andre. Whatever the reasons (and some do spring to mind) it is a matter of record that the general public did not become aware of this purchase until the media noticed it four years later, and by the time the storm broke it had already been removed from display. The resulting furore gave the press a field day and provoked a debate that still continues. Some serious and interesting reactions did, however, emerge. Two of them are perhaps worth noting: One of these reactions was an editorial by Riahard Cork, in an issue of a monthly art journal notoriously partisan to the modernist faction, but on this occasion, it seems also as a reaction to the questions raised, entirely devoted to articles which hoped to provoke awareness of the need to re-establish the links between artist and society, and to which I have already referred in an earlier chapter.[*] The other was the article in Encounter (referred to above) which is a magazine with a much wider readership.

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[1] 'Brickbats for the Tate'. Encounter, May 1976.

[*] Tate

After noting the rareness of any public reaction to museum acquisitions, Cork went on to remark that a furore of this nature was "no substitute for a permanent and positive interaction between contemporary art and the public with which it would presumably like to communicate."[1] He roundly condemned the internality of modernist discourse, of which this was only an instance.

If it is true, as he has urged, that the artists which feed the modern museum should minimise this internal discourse in favour of contact with and nourishment of the wider audience they now ignore at their peril, how much more urgent this injunction to the museum which ought to be a potent vehicle for such contact and nourishment. If we allow museums to act as a forum for conflicting points of view, we should certainly never allow them to form a platform for one point of view at the expense of others.

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[*] Studio International, March/April 1976 p.94.
[1] Ibid.

Edward Lucie-Smith made a similar plea, and mourned the fact that an opportunity was missed here for an investigation into the rôle of the museum in our society. He even hinted that the outcry provoked by this acquisition might have prompted some sort of attempt to assess the relationship between modernism and contemporary social conditions (without, however, appearing to make any moves in that direction himself.)[x]

Five years on, neither the art magazine in question, nor the museum of modern art in general, appears to have taken a great deal of notice of these warnings. The 'incestuous debate' still pays tribute to the ghost of revolution, but resolves nothing in relation to society as a whole. In fact, the manner in which some of the great museums operate is fast making a visit to a truly disinterested museum a memory to cherish.

In the show-business atmosphere which has in so many instances displaced the more subtle processes of art appreciation (the great spectaculars organised to lubricate the museum turnstiles, the outlandish sums paid for works of art and which in themselves seem to be looked upon as some sort of triumph), the work of art can no longer speak to the audience as it once spoke. For it is asked to become not an object for contemplation, but a spectacle; its meaning, particularly in the case of some recent purchases of 'old masters', quite eclipsed by the enormous price. But vox populi is never raised to such a pitch by these purchases as it is by the purchase of works like Mr Andre's firebricks.

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[x] 'Brickbats for the Tate'. E. Lucie-Smith. Encounter, May 1976. p.61.

The major distinction in the public mind being that while the four million might be vastly more than they wish to pay for a Rembrandt, they do not doubt that the Rembrandt is a worthy acquisition. The bricks, on the other hand, constitute a double offence. The overwhelming majority of the public upon whose subscription through tax such museums depend will never be persuaded that such a work is worthy of contemplation - anything they pay for it (and it is seldom cheap) will be too much. Also, as this instance underlined, it will in a relatively short time yield its place to another, while the Rembrandt is unlikely ever to languish in the cellars. The most obvious argument against four-million-dollar Rembrandts is that a dozen Dutch seventeenth century works might have been purchased for the same sum, whose collective aesthetic worth could well have equalled that of the Rembrandt. But it is far from being the most important. The most damaging result of such purchases is the attitude towards art that they generate. As Robert Hughes has rightly pointed out, the work takes on a special rarity because of the price paid for it, removing it from amongst its peers, and so from its proper place in art's flow of discourse.* This reduces the work; it does not elevate it. For the price has become an indelible part of the subject, irretrievably relating it to those very forces from which art, in our time as in any other, ought to provide sanctuary. The museum of modern art is perpetually seen to fail, by its selection of works for purchase, to imply preference based upon the communicable values that must form the premise of any venture into cultural enlightenment. Not unlike the salons which they have largely replaced as representers of current art (and supposedly disinterested representers at that) these museums have burdened themselves with adherence to a movement which is showing all the signs of decrepitude. The result is, of course, that increasingly what they show is not modern art, but modernist art. What they acquire is by no means impartially representative of what is current, as one is given to understand is their brief. This sort of brief was evolved at a time when the vulnerable avant-garde needed protection from the barons of the art establishment. The avant-garde, as we knew it, has to all intents and purposes become the establishment. And the minority cultural elite of yore has long abandoned its ivory tower to expand confidently into a vast, international commercial enterprise, with incalculable vested interests. This new establishment has installed its own bureaucracy, which buys and subsidizes for quite as many questionable reasons as the art bureaucracy of the bad old days. The same revolutionary creed is invoked in support of this new establishment, as was in the past called upon in opposition to the establishment.

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* Time Essay, "Confusing Art with Bullion" Dec 1979 p.50-51.

The experts make a point of presenting the public with works which arouse at the very least perplexity, and often indignation. At best the sympathetic viewer will look to them for enlightenment; at worst the people will howl for blood. The first reaction is wholly advantageous, for it not only emphasises their priestly stature, it also gives them something purposeful to do. "The labour of making converts to 'modernism' continues, since, thank God, there are still hordes of the unconverted."[1]

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[1] W. Lucie-Smith op.cit. p.62.

And even the second reaction may be turned to good use: "The representatives of the institution are able to preen themselves on the fact that their kind of modernism needs defending, and therefore remains modern."[1] The museum of art has abdicated its responsibilities, casting its lot with the complacent internal discourse of modernism on the one hand, and with the unstoppable juggernaut of high finance on the other, driven by whatever unimaginable pressures. Far from being in any position to rescue art from its present plight, the museum appears to be beyond its depth, for it is hard to see how it could absorb the full conflict without destroying itself. The 'old master' museum is locked into the intricacies of Wall Street; the museum of modern art, trapped by its brief, is locked into the great game of modernism.

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1. E. Lucie-Smith op.cit. p.62.

(iii) Art Market & the Dealer

Art dealing as we know it had its birth in a period about which we are extremely well informed, which is fortunate for the purposes of examining its provenance, and one which, in terms of the art market (though not at all in terms of the spirit or quality of the merchandise) is not unlike our own.

The boom in the Netherlands during the seventeenth century produced a situation quite unfamiliar to Western civilization. Competitive patronage, producing competitive painting, induced a surplus of art and artists where there was no church and no extravagant aristocracy to absorb the huge output. There was only a population of canny burghers with a keen sense of the value of their money. The consequences for painting in the Netherlands were regrettable. The art market - for it was a market in the most literal sense of the word - developed into a competitive rat-race, and many of the most original talents were hardest hit. The distressing fate of the greatest names in Dutch art is familiar enough. For it was at this point that a sinister figure entered the art world - the art dealer. He was rapidly to change the whole face of the art market.

During the previous centuries artists had kept up direct contact with their patrons, and they needed to be able to offer them a wide range of products: They would produce subject-matter according to demand - either religious or mythological or entirely secular. Their tasks could easily include the painting of decorations for religious festivals or court celebrations, tapestry designs, ornamental furniture and so on.

The art dealer, whose interest was of course in quick profits, soon enough saw the commercial undesirability of such a system. If artists confined themselves to the subjects they could paint best and fastest, their pictures began to follow a recognisable formula that made them easier to sell. Thus the dealers' mercenary motives reinforced the growing fashion for recording every aspect of Holland and Dutch life, and so encouraged an extreme specialisation in painting. The worst results stemmed from the fact that the dealer, unlike the great private art patrons of former times, was not buying to satisfy his own tastes. His livelihood depended upon his ability to calculate which pictures would prove most popular and have the widest sales. In short he was catering for, thereby entrenching, and finally creating mass tastes. This led to the deplorable situation, familiar ever since, of wanton neglect of the best talents. Painters whose work in any way deviated from the popular norm soon became outcasts. The inevitable end of this sytem was the triumph of mediocrity, and it largely accounts for the demise of great Dutch painting a bare sixty years after Hals first gave it national character. Much the same situation arose in France during the nineteenth century, when conditions were similar, and the most important artists frequently suffered the greatest hardships. It has in fact been a classic problem of middle class cultures based on free enterprise, where religious and aristocratic taste are no longer important. The parallels with our own time are evident, and the results no more felicitous:

The painter today is as much at the mercy of the fashions in taste as was his Dutch counterpart. Also, as a rule, he is not in direct contact with his patron. The artist and his patron can of course meet, but they are unlikely to trust or understand one another. For the now still greater number of intermediaries wedged, it seems irremovably, between artist and patron, have taught them both attitudes that make such meetings unfruitful. The artist has come to believe the unlikely dictum that his patrons are everywhere and always his inferior in matters of taste and sensibility; the patron has come to adopt a defensive and suspicious attitude toward the artist, which he would be unlikely to adopt towards any other profession. Given the polarisation of professional life-styles, this is understandable. The dealer's rôle in the affair is shaped, as is the critic's, toward the process of self-aggrandisement first. Any benefit that might accrue to the artist is incidental to this process. That there have been, in the history of dealing, men who displayed a remarkable degree of disinterested enthusiasm for painters they believed in, does not alter the fact that the type of dealer described above is the rule. He first encourages a style which looks as though it will turn a profit, and soon enough, providing the returns are good enough, is dictating to the artist in much the same manner as the Dutch dealer of the seventeenth century.

The power and influence wielded by such dealers acts as a further barricade between artist and public. Bereft of confidence in their own judgement, this public is likely to stifle its own preferences and defer to the promptings of the dealer, which are hardly likely to be disinterested: perhaps we need to remind ourselves that the dealer, like any man of trade, has a commodity to sell and a market to create and nourish. We cannot expect him to make any move to jeopardize the present situation, for it is so wholly advantageous to his trade that he will surely preserve it as best he can.

The trick, developed in the sixties, of picking out the whizz-kids from the art schools, and subjecting them to massive promotion, is essentially a dealer's trick. But it is the sort of trick to throw the life of the younger artist into confusion. The more mature artist has often learned the hard way that the dealer is not his friend, any more than is the critic who appears to promote him - the artist trapped by his own style is a familiar figure on the twentieth century field. (Versatile artists are regarded with deep suspicion by their critics and with commonsense aversion for the unpredictable by the dealers. This aversion has been transmitted, for much the same sort of reason, by both parties, to the public: artists who defy classification according to fashionable and therefore profitable canons are likely to be dropped.) Many of the celebrated modern artists have been seen to spend the greater part of their lives in incestuous imitation of themselves, particularly if their success has been early. This attitude is frequently engendered at the art school by those who should know better. The aspiring artist, encouraged by his instructors, has come to believe that achieving a recognisable personal style is his first and only important goal, and generally all else is sacrificed toward this end. Much of the time that should go into real training, is spent in a pathetic effort to invent such a style.

The presence of the dealer, and the apparent success of those artists that gain a place in his stable has entrenched the idea that there are short-cuts to becoming an artist. There never were and never will be. There are short-cuts to becoming known as an artist, and it is this that concerns the dealer, and in which he is expert. For it is this, and not its quality, which moves his merchandise. The temptation to the young artist is considerable, for this is also generally the more lucrative accomplishment.

In fact the goal of the quick-success artist more often than not turns out to be a chimera. The art boom benefits primarily the collector and the middleman. Few artists share in it, for boom conditions in art, symptomatic of heaven knows what in terms of world economy, create an unreal system of reputation, with most of the benefits reserved for the few stars of the stable, and very little for the rest. They also make qualitative judgements less and less important.

The boom in the art market must, by some standards, be regarded as a galloping success. But, as Degas is reported to have remarked, there are some kinds of success that are indistinguishable from panic. This panic has spread its contagion, inevitably, to the art schools that feed the market. That such success as they produce (so many stars of twenty years ago have sunk without a trace) is of a progressively meretricious and short-lived nature does not seem to concern them, though it must finally threaten them as well.

If the astonishing richness of Dutch seventeenth century painting could fade in such a short time to such mediocrity, with the proliferation of skilled but unimaginative artists whose works produced a glut on the art market, then what should we expect in our own time, where commerce is even more ruthless, promotion more cynical, and even the safeguard of skill so disregarded? The present art-educational system, still riding the boom (how long can it last?) turns out a proportionately far greater number of 'artists', mostly unimaginative, mostly greedy, and mostly without skill or scholarship. A dealer's dream, in fact. We can expect no quarter from him. For the dealer, in concert with the critic and the instructor of the kind that predominates at the contemporary school, and for his own equally base reasons, urges the young artist to learn the stance of the artist, to make himself known as an artist, rather than encourage that which is the student's rightful pursuit - to acquire art.

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3. CREATIVITY, CULTURE AND CHILD ART

(i) Creativity and Culture

A great deal of stress is currently laid on the idea of 'creative' teaching, and 'creative' lessons of all kinds are to be found on the progressive curriculum. Equally, lessons which lay stress upon discipline and the acquisition of skills and knowledge in an empirical fashion are likely to be criticised for lacking spontaneity and 'creativity'.

The word is usually used to denote a vague notion of something with desirable overtones, something which we are persuaded that we and our children should all possess. Popular usage commonly denotes nothing more than a propensity for making things: when a mother describes her boy as 'creative' she often means nothing more than that he is given to activities which produce pleasing or decorative objects, such as model ships or short stories for the school magazine. Here nothing at all is implied about the quality of what is produced - mere productiveness is what is being described, without any suggestion as to why this should be desirable.

The normative use of the word does imply that the quality is in some way desirable, and so must have certain conditions written into it, if it is to have any useful meaning in any terms at all and certainly if it is to be so widely used in relation to education. The most widely accepted condition (nowadays frequently stressed to the detriment of further conditions) is that the work the creative person produces should, to qualify, be his own - the outcome of his own reasoning, planning, shaping, so that it represents a personal way of seeing the thing that he is making. In this sense the skilled forger, though his other qualities as a painter may command admiration, in no way can be seen as a creative artist.

But these two conditions (productivity and originality) are not sufficient to characterise a creative person, for on these terms virtually everyone could be 'creative' and the term would cease to mean anything in particular, and cease to have any overtones of desirability. The third necessary condition ought to be that what one creates should be original in the sense that it breaks new ground. This statement needs immediate qualification. This does not at all (necessarily) mean a break with the traditional techniques and means of the sphere of activity in question, or we should have to deny creative originality to a great many people, Einstein, Leonardo and Bach amongst them. The criterion of originality here does mean, however, that the work of such people should in some way be distinctive. However small the measurable differences between such a person's work and that of any other, it is this distinctiveness which draws our attention, and its consistent growth (along with other factors to be discussed) which finally singles out such men.

So we arrive at the view that a creative person in any sphere is one who tends to produce original (in the sense of distinctive) work that represents his own way of looking at things in that sphere. But there must, for this condition to be so desirable, be added yet another condition.

Without some reference to quality we should, by using only the foregoing conditions, arrive at the paradoxical situation where anyone working independently, even through his ignorance, could be termed 'creative' in that the work he produces will be very much his own, and different from anyone else's. Because I am unschooled in writing, any poem I write will be distinctive, ergo I am a poet, and a poet is generally understood to be a creative person. Once more, this throws open to question the desirability of being creative. Since we all agree that creativity is desirable we are obliged to accept that some reference to quality be a pre-condition. (Once again, without such reference, the term ceases to single out anything of significance.) Since we do not, most of us, accept 'creativity' as a purely descriptive term without connotations of value, we find we must turn to the question of standards. Having done so, we must consider our priorities in the classroom.

What are our objectives in promoting this 'creativity' in the school (or for that matter in the junior years of the art school)? Is it the highest value in education? Surely, in some senses, it is. But is the highest necessarily the first? Or is this condition the prize for the few that will arise from the general good? It does seem that we are embracing an approach which, while sacrificing the general good, does little for the few. However desirable some people may consider it that all artists should be original in the sense understood above, it does seem inescapable that a pre-condition for any of them being original in that sense is that their education should aim at making them all good. That it should not fail to establish standards by which we may judge the work creative or not.

Where the currently fashionable idea of 'creativity' most markedly fails in progressive education is in this very condition of quality. One is apt to come across periods called 'creativity hour' on the progressive curriculum - a term which, in vacuo, means nothing at all. However, the implication is that children are likely to be engaged upon those activities in which most people expect 'creativity' to flourish, such as art or writing, as opposed to maths or geography. Advanced educationists are apt to lay the stress, in such 'creativity' classes, on freedom of expression as the necessary condition for the promotion of imaginative work. While a measure of such freedom is necessary, placing all the stress upon complete freedom of expression is self-defeating. For so far there is no evidence to support the idea that children will necessarily become imaginative simply because they are free to express themselves, and, as is commonly supposed to be beneficial, are deprived of instruction directly concerned with the field in which they are expected to be creative. Children cannot be expected to become creative artists if they are reared under the impression that anything they do which has their heart in it is creative for that reason alone.

The same sort of argument must arise in assessing the value of so much of what currently counts as artistic expression. A great deal of activity in the sphere of the arts is justified by just such an incomplete argument: I throw a soda bottle into the sea. I call it art, because it is entirely my own spontaneous action. And a great deal of 'teaching' goes on according to the same principle, most notably in contemporary schools of art. The arguments are all, in these cases, against teaching 'how' to paint, or compose, or write. And indeed it is conceivable that an excess of such teaching, or, more correctly, an imbalance in teaching programs, can have and has had a stultifying effect upon spontaneity. But it is also true that the great majority of memorable 'creative' artists in all fields have emerged from a schooling that taught them, as it were, to spell and punctuate. It is even true that much creative work has been produced according to canons and sets of rules we should now shrink from as hopelessly stifling, and nonetheless gives every appearance of originality and spontaneity; also that there are limits beyond which even those who have deliberately countered conventional standards cannot go if their work is to remain comprehensible to others. Spontaneity alone is not sufficient to produce creative work or to mould creative people - to become such the student of the arts, as of any other sphere, must develop skills relevant to his chosen sphere, understanding of other creative works in this field, and familiarity with what has gone before and constitutes the standards of excellence by which we will adjudge him 'creative' in the first place. As I have suggested in the chapter on 'child art', much of what passes for creative art in schools is not creative at all, the methods of arriving at it do not necessarily produce creative artists, but rather a group with a vague conviction that self-expression is the highest goal in life, and finally it seriously raises the question of just what the value is of such self-expression in educational terms.

> "Self-expression is, of course, a necessary condition of creativity and therefore if creativity is our goal, self-expression must play a part. But, since it is not a sufficient condition, it cannot be our sole consideration ... (perhaps) we have to ask the question whether the emphasis on self-expression can be justified without reference to creativity. Presumably it may be defended to some extent on therapeutic or psychological grounds. That is to say it would not be implausible to suggest that some opportunity for self-expression without reference to critical standards may be educationally valuable in that it provides relaxation and promotes self-confidence in children. Further than this it may lead children to reveal more of

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> their inner self which may have psychological value. For example a child with a troubled home background may derive some benefit from writing freely about this. But clearly not all children are in need of such therapy and even for those who are, there are other things to be done in schools besides provide it. If all writing lessons become exercises in self-expression they cease to provide relaxation, and if all writing is self-expression only it ceases to promote self-confidence. For why should being able to do what anybody else can do promote self-confidence? The conclusion that seems inescapable is that self-expression in the artistic sphere has a part to play both because it can be educationally valuable and because it is one necessary part of artistic creativity. But self-expression alone is not sufficient to warrant talk of creativity."[1]

To sum up the foregoing: "To be creative in any specific sphere demands knowledge and understanding of that sphere. Any education which ignores this point is not making a realistic effort to promote creativity in various spheres."[2] Having attempted a clarification of what is meant by the term 'creativity' as it is so freely used, having attempted to rescue it from the fog of ambiguity in which it presently finds itself, it now remains to discover its value (both from the point of view of the attempted complete sense defined above, and from that of the various incomplete senses in which, particularly in apologies for current educational schemes, it is commonly applied) to discover its value in the promotion of the widely agreed-upon ideal of a 'cultured' society.

This is not the place for digression of any length into the various meanings of the word 'culture'. The sense which needs investigation here

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1. Philosophy of Education. Woods & Barrow, Methuen 1975 p.156.
2. Philosophy of Education. Woods & Barrow, Methuen 1975 p.155.

is that of what Eliot has called High Culture.* In this sense we say of one that he is a 'cultured man' and of another that he has no 'culture'. It is used always in the sense of something cultivated as opposed to something organic or inborn, and in this sense must be regarded as something acquired, even, in some measure, achieved; thus it is something toward which education would have us aspire. The other common meaning for the word 'culture', that which denotes simply a code of living, or an ethnic group, or a group within a group, is properly a sociological and anthropological term and has no direct bearing on this argument. It has no place here because such a 'culture' flourishes organically and not as a result of any system of education which aspires to more than indoctrination or initiation. As Eliot has pointed out, it develops not because of any educational schemes but in spite of them, and the only identifiable effect of imposed education on this sort of culture is one of loss. Eliot, Bantock and Barrow and others seem to agree that to promote culture, creativity should be clearly directed toward identified spheres - that no man can be merely 'cultured' without some such condition being written into the definition, when it is their education that we are considering. (Examples abound of men who evidence extreme cultured sensibility in one sphere and conspicuous lack of it in others, whom we nonetheless are ready to regard as 'cultured', as well as men who appear to evidence an all-round sensibility which makes their opinions valuable on a variety of subjects. These last are more frequently sensitive dilettantes than artists, more frequently appreciaters than doers, and so must be put aside from this argument for the moment.) Accepting that 'high culture' will always, by its nature, be restricted to a relative minority within the wider anthropological or sociological culture, it is clear that such a collective can only arise when the spheres represented are themselves highly developed at the base level from which the collective stands apart. Its development rests upon a degree of immersion in their spheres, by each group of specialists in education, which we are in the process of forfeiting in our pursuit of the chimera of generalised culture - a vague and ill-defined goal popularly thought to be the outcome of abandoned freedom of expression.

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* Notes towards the Definition of Culture, Faber & Faber 1948.

The collective effect of groups of highly developed sensibilities operative in the variety of spheres associated with it (music, theatre, dance, art, philosophy etc.) has in the past been seen to constitute what we might with justification call 'high culture'. The point is that such high culture is by its nature set apart from (and in some universally agreed sense, above) the wider culture of any group or period, and simultaneously must arise from it. It is at once a point of aspiration for the general mass of education, and the end result of the best that such education can produce.

This raises a number of difficulties. Not least amongst these is the propitiation of those voices that make an issue of equality and democracy in education. Eliot, at least, dismisses such claims as not only impractical - in view of the differences between pupils (for it is hardly realistic to imagine that all are capable of acquiring the same skills, or of absorbing the same knowledge) and even in view of the differences between their deserts, but also as unproductive of consistently high standards. What he does assert as the necessary condition in any education that has this end in mind, is that the artist should concentrate upon his canvas, the poet upon his typewriter, the civil servant upon the solving of civil problems. "Culture" he says "is the one thing we cannot deliberately aim at. It is the product of a variety of more or less harmonious activities, each pursued for its own sake."[1] He makes it abundantly clear, however, that he does not favour the present situation, where "Religious thought and practice, philosophy and art, all tend to become isolated areas cultivated by groups in no communication with each other."[2] So the point would seem to be that in no way should the artist concentrate on his canvas to the exclusion of the other things cultural, but that he ought to concentrate upon this pursuit for its own sake, if his efforts are to be fruitful enough to contribute to the collective culture.

Now clearly this is not going to be easy, when the artist is no longer sure what his canvas is, in the sense that a Corot or a Poussin was sure. It is not helpful to tell the artist, as so many of his instructors presently feel constrained to do, that his canvas is himself, that expression of that self is the only worthy aim, or more correctly, the entirety of that aim, that art is not 'about' anything, and so much more of that fustian which makes up the jargon of avant-garde teaching.

To return to the schoolchild in the artroom: It seems reasonable to conclude from these arguments that the whole question of 'creativity' as it is interpreted in present-day schools, and which is expected to promote culture, ought to be seriously reviewed. After so many years of experiments, one more could be tried:

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1. T.S. Eliot, op.cit., p.19.
2. Ibid p.26.

It might be argued that sensitivity sessions could profitably give way to hard lessons in the skills and knowledge needed for understanding and appreciation of those spheres concerned; that a number of years spent in intensive pursuit of such skills and knowledge has in the past been seen to lead to a healthy and concerted 'high culture' in sound relation to the wider culture from which it has arisen, mostly because this system has shown itself capable of producing men who are indeed in a position to 'break new ground' in a distinctive fashion. In short, it might be expected to produce the authority of the individual in each sphere, and the standards of excellence by which 'high culture' judges them, so conspicuously lacking in the present situation.

Eliot is not alone in asserting that this high culture is, quite simply, what makes life worth living for those who have the capacity for it; what saves them from boredom and despair. He has also insisted that religion and culture are both aspects of the same thing, and that neither is a mere aspect of the other as it has from time to time been popular to suggest. So that one must take care to avoid the suggestion that one may be an alternative to the other - that religion may act as a substitute for culture or culture for religion. Their functions are as frequently distinct as they are inseparable, and to remove either from the thought and practice of the other is to diminish it.

Where does this leave us, a good many years further into the religious disintegration of which Eliot was so conscious in 1948? If anything has effectively replaced the God-centred religion of Christianity in our culture, in terms of how that religion affected the thought and practice of High Culture, it is the new religion of the self. Never before have so many people been so endlessly exercised with matters pertaining to themselves, and so few exercised with matters pertaining to God. This is indubitably a major aspect of our anthropological/sociological culture, and has duly played its rôle in the shaping of our 'high culture'. It does not seem an exaggeration to say that we have imposed the self and its indulgence to such a degree that the pursuit of that which may give refinement and delight to those very emotions which must come into play, to give meaning to high culture, presents a conflict that we cannot accommodate. In conclusion, the common-sense aversion of Aldous Huxley for educational nonsense demonstrates, a good many years after its writing, a resounding truth:

"There is no substitute for correct knowledge, and in the process of acquiring that knowledge there is no substitute for concentration and prolonged practice. Unfortunately there are many professional educationists who seem to think that children should never be required to work hard. Whenever educational methods are based on this assumption, children will not in fact acquire much knowledge; and if these methods are followed for a generation or two, the society which tolerates them will find itself in full decline."[1]

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[1] Bedford, S. 'Aldous Huxley; A Biography.' Vol. 2. Chatto & Windus Associated with Collins, London. 1974 p.210.

(ii) The Problem of Child Art*

Perhaps one of the most interesting phenomena in art education over the past half century has been the growing interest in child art. Apart from the very considerable influences generated by a more widespread acceptance of primitive or ethnic art forms by the cultured, this phenomenon has in many ways run parallel to a more general taste for modern art and the acceptance by the public of less representational works than were in fashion a hundred years ago. It is hard to imagine a nineteenth century adult finding much merit in the sort of pictures currently displayed in centres of child art. We, on the other hand, are not merely indulgent towards these clumsy paintings, but find in them qualities that are touching, humorous and frequently endearing. Just those qualities, in fact, which one finds in the child himself. This has led to a general conviction that under no circumstances should such innocent exuberance be stemmed, or stifled with the harsher disciplines of the drawing class of former times. These qualities, however, cannot be taught or acquired; they are intuitive or they are nothing. Where attempts have been made to 'teach' such qualities, the falseness of the results is plain to see.

As the child enters puberty, the delightful qualities which distinguish child art are soon smothered in a welter of complexes. It has emerged as one of the chief problems amongst art teachers that during their early teens children seem to lose most of the qualities for which we most prize child art. At the majority of exhibitions of child art the work of the older children tends to be dull and lifeless. And it is in dealing with this group that some currently fashionable methods of teaching art, whatever their benefits for the younger group, fail lamentably. It is extraordinary how persistent some theories remain, despite their demonstrable lack of success. (They are apt to become lodged and slowly decay in the tributaries of educational practice long after the mainstream has absorbed and processed fresh ideas. In some instances this might protect the children in provincial schools from the frenetic vicissitudes that plague those teachers who consider such things important.)

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* I have used the conventional term 'child art' throughout this chapter to avoid confusion in discussing the efforts of young children. That I consider this term well overdue for review will be evident from my arguments. For the use of the term 'art' in this context suggests synonymity with the term 'self-expression'.

During the fifties and sixties the watchwords in teaching art to the young were 'self-expression' and 'loosening up'. If one's superiors were consulted their advice tended to be "get the class to express itself", and 'loosening up' was achieved by setting such subjects as 'An explosion in a paint shop' or 'Taking a line for a walk'. Imagination was at a premium, and any deviation from these methods was thought to be reactionary, and the first step towards returning children to those highly modelled, rubbed charcoal drawings of egg-cups and spoons so popular in the bad old days. Since the passing of that age of ebullient confidence 'free expression' in many other areas of education has been called into question, and a good deal of nonsense cleared away by respected philosophers of education, like Munro, Barrow, Woods, Peters and others upon whose arguments I have drawn in the previous chapters.

It is at the onset of puberty, and sometimes earlier, that a child begins seriously to aspire to the exigencies of the adult world. The mere encouragement of self-expression, which has produced such charming results in the work of children of the younger age groups, becomes a positive danger when dealing with the young adolescent. The exercise becomes futile, when the first years of primary education are past, unless the child is equipped with responsible means toward achieving such expression. It is at this stage that many teachers with confused ideas about the value of self-expression, and the use of imagination, and with fears about tampering with emerging personalities, become inhibited about guiding and assisting their students and fall back on methods that have proved successful with much younger classes.

The first symptom of adolescence that the child evidences in painting is an alarming loss of confidence. The spontaneity and vigour of his infant work have evaporated. He begins to seek help, to look for a rational structure, and any ambiguous answers about 'self-expression' at this stage will not only prove futile, but will often make him resentful. If the teacher maintains his position of encouraging onlooker, his lack of confidence must communicate itself to his pupils.

One of the prominent traits of the teenager is the desire to emulate - the young adolescent will emulate, will look for a mentor. It is a large part of the duty of his teacher to guide him towards emulation of quality, towards sources outside of himself towards which he can aspire and which have value that is communicable to him. Left to feed only on himself he becomes dislocated and uncertain, for he instinctively wishes to be presented with absolutes of excellence by which to set his standards. Teachers who ignore this aspiration do incalculable damage to the pupil's regard for the subject. This is the period at which, if they are not firmly handled, children turn immediately to copying the worst and most vapid kind of picture from popular sources - pulp magazines, record sleeves, advertisements. The bold mental concepts of the child, which he expresses with such charm and force on paper, with only the sketchiest reference to visual data, have disappeared at this stage, leaving a vacuum into which all the feeblest inanities of the adult world, if unchecked, will flow. The cowardly buffer against this sort of contingency, of encouraging the gauche pastiches of cubism and surrealism that one cringes from on high school displays, is a poor substitute for genuine instruction.

The teacher should attempt to fill the vacuum with the more rational concepts and sustained disciplines of maturity. Technical training can begin in earnest, for it will be found, if the theories can be laid aside for a moment, that there is nothing the average adolescent admires more than technical skill. This admiration should be channelled, not stifled. Instead of having such desires undermined or made to appear unworthy, with vague admonitions about loosening up or 'being himself' (an injunction sure to produce alarm in most teenagers) the child should be provided at this stage with a structure for getting to grips with the visual world. Careful drawing, basic perspective, the elements of composition, can now be introduced with the expectation of positive results. The child is thereby provided with the rudimentary equipment for exploring the visual world in a rational manner.

If the curriculum is to be of benefit both to those who are potential artists and to the group as a whole, that is, if it is to have educational value, it should have a tried, sound form. Richard Carline, in his history of art teaching and examining 'Draw they Must', makes the point that representational art has great educational value in training observation of and visual interest in the natural world in all children, and he considers it to be essential in all schools of general education.

He suggests that the approach should be adhered to, for better or worse, stressing the benefits of a consistent approach. And if art teachers, by trying to keep abreast of every new development, are to "lean first on one side and then on the other, their ship is bound to capsize. In other subjects, such as science, teachers do not necessarily adopt, though they may take note of, every fleeting experiment, and there is no reason why every experiment in art, perhaps equally fugitive, should be instantly adopted in schools."[1]

As in all other disciplines the child is in instinctive need of boundaries and confines if he is to orientate himself within the confusing abundance of forms and influences that beset the path to maturity. If a consistent approach is maintained, the child develops habits of learning and persistence parallel to those required to pursue any other discipline. If the elements outlined above are introduced, and the teacher has no fears about applying a strong guiding hand, the transition to more responsible expression can be comparatively painless. The adolescent period is the so-called difficult period for art teaching of which so many teachers despair, and anyone familiar with those endless pictures of vitiated mannikins presented under the banner of imaginative work might very well sympathise with them. When adolescents are taught with proper control in the senior standards at school and are not fobbed off with the backwash of child art, they are in a very strong position to continue their studies at an art school. They have learnt some of the elements of drawing; they have become aware of ideas about composition, and they have begun to apply a critical intelligence to work other than their own.

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1. Richard Carline 'Draw They Must'. Edw. Arnold, 1968. p.272.

The mastery of any art is a long and hard study - it is axiomatic in music and dancing for the young to start their training at an early age, and to pursue their studies under rigorous and uncompromising discipline throughout their childhood. It is time that demonstrably false ideas about art, which bedevil the teaching of art at an important stage of development, were cleared away once and for all.

All that has gone before assumes the ideal situation of the disinterested and capable teacher, and an art room filled with eager and properly selected pupils. This raises what is perhaps the most important issue of all, and which is dramatically illustrated in South African schools, where such a situation is extremely rare. Where it does exist, it must be extremely hard to maintain, for the odds stacked against it are overwhelming. The great bugbear of art teaching at school level in this country is the principle of the soft option. And though it is more blatantly applied here than in other countries I have visited, it is inevitably a universal problem.

The art class in many schools acts as a sort of catch-all for those children considered too dull to make a go of what our authorities are pleased to consider the more demanding subjects, so that one will frequently find it offered as an alternative to subjects like mathematics. Taking this a step further, those schools which offer an art matriculation tend to collect the rejects from others who wish to maintain a respectable academic record. Music, as it is still taught, could never be regarded as an easy option to anything, for it quite obviously requires rigorous dedication. The fact that most children (and they are quite right) have come to look upon the art course as such, indicates quite clearly how degraded the subject has become in the public mind. This situation is well-nigh impossible to reverse, not least on the count of teacher attitude, as it is most widely displayed. For in order to re-instate the subject as a serious and worthwhile pursuit, as opposed to a soft option, a veritable reversal of current teaching philosophy would be necessary. There are, despite the systems which militate against their survival, still some of those rare teachers about, though it seems not in art, for whom the care of the subject is of the first importance, the care of the pupil second, and everything else on a lower level altogether. There is a school of thought, not a new one, and now regarded as hopelessly reactionary and repressive, that holds that unless the care of the subject indeed comes first, the teacher is the wrong man for the job. For we have for some time accepted teachers in whose 'training' (as opposed to education) method has grossly usurped the space that previously was devoted to substance. As with other subjects, so with art. The student who proposes to teach art to others spends, in the studio, a fraction of the time spent by the 'Fine Art' students, on the extraordinary premise that he needs less expertise and knowledge than they. (This is not a surprising development, considering that for several decades what went on in the studios was not regarded as the gaining of knowledge at all.)

If we add together the persistence of clapped-out theories, the patronising attitude of 'educators' to the subject, and the degrading of art in the public mind, then the doldrum position of art on the school curriculum is not difficult to understand.

The converse of all this is of course the esteem in which the subject is held by those who do not envisage it as a possible profession. (And this utilitarian principle is causing grave concern in some circles of education.) Such pupils can quite easily, certainly in South African schools, emerge from their school career without ever having encountered any serious application of the disciplines of art. And, thus, without ever having thought about art. At best they will have played at it in the junior standards, after which it must make way for more serious business.

At most contemporary schools in South Africa, for example, enquiries about the curriculum would be met with this answer: the art classes are small or non-existent because so few of the pupils have shown any talent or inclination for art, that a class is not warranted. This answer is only possible where the education authorities have ceased to regard art as having any educational value. In his history of art teaching and examining 'Draw They Must',[1] Richard Carline proposes a very different outlook: That it is "those whose aesthetic faculties are weak, whose visual impressions and powers of observation are dim, and for whom art is like a closed book, who chiefly need attention form the art teacher."[1] He is, of course, simply stressing the educational benefit of art as a discipline alongside those of, say, language and mathematics. He further suggests very strongly that if art is to act as an educational force, its principles for teaching should be firmly established and abided by. The current tendency towards ever younger 'streaming' and specialisation seriously thwarts any attempts to give art teaching the desirable broader educational objectives that remain unquestioned in other subjects. That the subject has fallen prey to ostensibly more pragmatic considerations is an indication of a malaise, in this discipline, of frightening

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1. Richard Carline: 'Draw They Must' Edw. Arnold. 1968. p.4.

proportions. Art is indeed a closed book to the great majority of ordinary citizens and they cannot entertain serious concern about it for their children, any more than the education authorities do for their charges. Art has very largely ceased to convince and therefore to concern most of these citizens, as anything more than a nostalgic memento of a lamented past.

The fact that the subject is not taken at all seriously by the great majority amongst such education authorities as control the curricula of our schools is illustrated in the contemptible baseness of so much of what passes for 'art', most particularly in the higher standards of the junior school. It is indeed rare to find it taught at this level with any regard whatever for the educational benefit it could offer. The much trumpeted emancipation (away from the egg-cups and spoons) has become badly tarnished. The vague activity called 'art' in the primary school, as often as not presided over by the woodwork or sewing teacher, is frequently found to consist of 'crafts' of such cretinous simplicity that no skill or sensibility need be called upon to produce the horrible artefacts that seem to be their aim.

Then there are those objects which are distinguishable as 'art' only by their lack of any identifiable function. A recent example came to my attention because it was the product of a project currently very popular at the primary school attended by my own children. The (woodwork) teacher supplies the children with duplicates of a linear design or picture, which they have to trace on to a piece of composition board. They then hammer small nails, half a centimetre apart, in rows along the lines, and proceed to stretch coloured wools from nail to nail. The final product is a mock 'modern' composition of incomparable nastiness.

This sort of atrocity is widely tolerated under the kind of lowest-common-denominator teaching that in so many cases is all that remains of the great liberation of the children from the oppression of the drawing class. The child may easily pass through seven years of primary schooling without acquiring one iota of skill or honest appreciation in art. No child could pass through the same number of years of music and sustain such an absence of growth. Yet every child admires and longs to emulate the envied few in the school who 'can draw'. With few exceptions, the majority of students who present themselves at art colleges for enrolment in Fine Art courses have only the coarsest and most superficial degree of both skill and sensibility to show for all their years of art instruction at school. Exceptional talent notwithstanding, it is safe to say that the overwhelming majority of first year students have entered the college at a level of technical and aesthetic development far below their potential.

One of the great banes of the serious art teacher (particularly when dealing with inspectors and others who must judge his performance) is the sentimental reverence for so-called 'primitive' expression and form which so bedevils the teaching of art at all levels. Carline himself seems prey to such sentimentality: "Visual art is a primitive activity in which people at the threshold of civilization excel. Thus the work of children may far excel what is produced by their elders. Such representational art may go hand in hand with visual experiments by boys and girls, perhaps abstract, 'Dadaist', or of some other character, by which they may forge new paths for their elders to follow."[1]

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1. Richard Carline 'Draw They Must', Edw. Arnold, 1968, p.273.

This statement will serve as a good example to point the important characteristics of the attitude at issue, for it embodies this sentimentality in its extreme manifestations, and is the more remarkable because it forms part of the concluding paragraph of an otherwise sound and thorough study of art teaching and examining, written by a recognised authority in this field. "Visual art is a primitive activity in which people at the threshold of civilization excel ..." If this statement means what it appears, astonishingly, to mean (that Carline is dismissing as in some way inferior nine tenths of our heritage) it might be brushed aside, were it not that it appears in such a book, widely read and probably influential, and were the sentence which follows it in the form of a corollary not the familiar coin of modern pedagogic talk:

"Thus the work of children may far excel what is produced by their elders." Well, indeed it may, but only in one particular, which is unteachable, and thus not at issue. It is not inconceivable that Carline sensed the glibness of juxtaposing these two statements in the form of an equation. The final sentence, suggesting that we look to our children for a guide for the future of our art, contains a parenthetical insertion which strongly suggests that he is not wholly confident of the thesis it proposes.

Quite apart from the implicit threat of invalidation of further education which this approach holds, the child who is beginning to aspire to adulthood ought not to be subjected to the seductions of such an idea. The word 'excel' is twice used in an ambiguous fashion. How may the work of children excel that of their elders? May it excel that of all their elders? Is all primitive art per se superior to all civilized art?

Perhaps Mr Carline means us to understand that the quality we have come to see as innocence, and which we perceive in the art of children and primitive people, is the highest value in art. There are some who subscribe to this strangely limited view, though they will find few children to agree with them. To subscribe to such a view in a private capacity is one thing; to propose it as a basis for education quite another. While the products of untutored children may frequently charm and amaze us with their unfettered emotional appeal, their unselfconscious delight in visual expression, and adults may look back with a sense of loss on such innocence - while all this is demonstrably true, surely innocence is indeed the province of young children, and must be relinquished with growth toward maturity. Innocence for the intelligent adult is a chimera, and to insist upon it in the aspiring adult is surely counter-educational, for it is sentimental. If genuine innocence persists into adulthood and a genuine primitive emerges, most modern curricula will serve him ill.

Our predecessors in the profession may well have erred in failing to perceive the charm and expressive power of the efforts of young children, though there is no great weight of evidence for this assumption; they may have understood less about the developing child as a result. This may even have in some way affected the art of their time. On the other hand the hoped-for benefits of such an attitude, as Carline displays, for the progress of our own art seem highly questionable. Not least because the basic premise seems flimsy.

The child's drawing of Mummy, however expressive of the child's psyche, however charming or endearing, when placed at the foot of the Discobolus, alongside Mme Riviera, or amongst the Burghers of Calais, remains but a child's drawing of Mummy. And to claim that the child's drawing can ever grasp the imagination of man as the works of the great masters have done, is to demonstrate, if the claim is sincere, a pathetic lack of any sense of the qualitative differences between things. What does this situation mean for the art colleges that must work with the graduands of the current system of art teaching? The student who will most readily benefit from higher education in his subject of art is not the student who has learnt at school to ape such pretensions. If, as a pupil at a secondary school, he has become persuaded that art is no more than an effortless splurging of his immature libido onto outsize canvasses; if he has been allowed to develop the 'exhibition' mentality that dogs his mentors; if, in short, he has not developed the profound respect for the subject that surely ought to have been one of the aims of his education, he will be a very difficult student to teach in any serious or constructive fashion. The majority of art schools will, however, accommodate such graduands, accommodate their persuasion that they are "forging new paths for their elders to follow" in an absurd reversal of values that makes mock of the entire concept of teaching - indeed many schools believe it to be their first duty to encourage such notions. (How they go about it will be the burden of a later section of this essay.) But there are students in sufficient number (and that number gives every appearance of rapidly growing) who are coming to resent the irretrievability of wasted formative years, and who also resent the patronising approach they find in the art college. There is abundant evidence of a major shift in values amongst the student body, and there appear to be few art colleges equipped to respond to it.

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4. THE SITUATION AT THE ART SCHOOL

The seventies and early eighties have seen the bold pronouncement by some prominent theorists of the arts that the age of the avant-garde has quite played itself out. Also, there has issued a variety of complaints and warnings from a wide range of sources which are of a less comprehensive nature, but which seem unerringly to underwrite such a suggestion. The warnings and complaints which I think we must urgently consider are those that (for the first time so widely and so radically) question the absolute identity of art with modernism; something which it has not been fashionable to query for some time. Perhaps this questioning is largely prompted by a pervasive disillusionment with the modern ideal in all aspects of daily living - in so many instances it has become transformed in people's minds from a promise to a threat. We have passed through a decade of widespread and growing uneasiness, in the arts as in most other spheres, during which a generation has come of an age to populate the art colleges, to whom the milestones of modernism (the main driving force of western culture for a hundred years) have taken on more and more the appearance of a period style. The sixties, during which most of these students' instructors themselves passed through art school, specialised in rapidly-passing, consumer-type styles or movements mostly redolent of the prevailing attitude of 'camp'. George Melley, who has written a perceptive history of the Pop era, has this to say about the phenomenon:

Camp consists in "a deification of sensation at an immediate level which is in itself profoundly pessimistic. The whole theory of 'camp' ... is hardly more than a sophisticated means of keeping any form of qualitative judgement at bay by agreeing enthusiastically with adverse criticism. By this method anything can be justified."[1] His sympathetic evaluation of the movement acknowledges the generosity of the original impulse to found a democratic culture, but also points out the weaknesses.

Two of these are worthy of mention in the present context. "It is essentially exclusive, tied only to the young and therefore incapable of development beyond a certain point."

"Pop's anti-intellectualism, its rejection of a cultural heritage in favour of instant creativity, means that its executants rely entirely on their own instincts. Most pop talent is, in the traditional sense, undereducated, improvisational rather than thoughtful". Thus by its nature it progresses toward an inevitable loss of confidence and "offers a series of gestures of increasing desperation expressed in the vocabulary of a clapped-out avant-garde."[2]

It is a feature of the modern movement that new clauses are perpetually being added to its constitution which in many instances seek to invalidate or supersede what has gone before. While these new criteria are constantly being introduced, those which they seek to supercede seem to remain in the critical archives, to be invoked when useful. In some quarters, for instance, bohemian virtues continue to be upheld, long after bohemia has ceased, in real life as opposed to romantic fiction, and with rare exceptions, to act as a vehicle for artistic genesis or rebirth. Some of the articles of the Pop faith have entered this class of portmanteau philosophizing. Amongst these its anti-intellectualism, its rejection of a cultural heritage, its insistence on uncritical reflection

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1. George Melley, 'Revolt into Style' Penguin p.228.
2. George Melley, op.cit. p.218.

of the period, and perhaps most lastingly "Pop has imposed the idea of instant success based on the promotion of a personal style, rather than a search for content or meaning."[1] Enough has been said elsewhere in this essay to make argument of these criteria unnecessary at this point.

However, many of them are still very much with us, and it is interesting to note this author's reaction to the results of their being put into practice: "Pop is in many ways an ersatz culture feeding off its own publicity and interested to an obsessive extent in its own image, reflected in the looking-glass world of the mass media."[2]

While great numbers of the brighter stars of the period appear to have burned themselves out, others have retreated into teaching and still others never faced the need to make such ideas work on a public footing and nevertheless still remain influential, as I shall show. This culture, then, provides the formative background for a significant proportion of tutors now controlling Fine Art programs throughout the western world.

Probably it is as old as the established art schools themselves, but, as in some other fields, there has long been an effective old boy network operating in staffing of influential art schools and allied institutions. Perhaps it is because, finding themselves to be influential and reaping the undoubted benefits that arise from this, such institutions develop an instinct for perpetuating the circumstances in which their influence will remain effective and visible. When the

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2. George Melley, op.cit. p.219.
2. George Melley, op.cit. p.219.

teachers at such schools perceive themselves to be part of a sphere of influence, or feel themselves to be part of a group or movement which they wish to make influential (either through genuine faith in some ideal or for some less exalted reason) they have a tendency to select and promote students not for their talent, but for the facility these students display in complementing their own work and ideas. The more esoteric the movement - in other words the less the public can relate to what it produces in the way of art - the stronger becomes the hold of the art world (the teachers, the critics, the dealers) over its members.

The major difference between similar systems in the past and those operating at present should not be overlooked. The older systems might have been as culpable as the new in that the master who saw social and material gain for himself tended to perpetuate through his students tastes in content and styles of representation which flattered his own pre-eminence. In so doing he also tended to widen and further exploit the market he had already spied, if his motives were materialistic, by schooling his proteges to foster it. His motives might have stemmed from convictions every bit as passionate as those claimed by his modern descendants, despite their doubts on the matter. What has to be recognised in his defence, however, is that the nature of what was taught and promoted through the old boy networks of former times was never so desperately limiting in terms of what the student might turn to later as an alternative. For quite as many of such students later shrugged off the limitations suggested by their teacher, as adhered to his edicts. The point is that, having made the spiritual or mental adjustment necessary to bring this about, they had at their disposal the wherewithal in terms of technical mastery with which to attempt to match their newfound sensibilities. It is very clear that this is not the case with their contemporary counterparts. And it is, to an alarming degree, these who people the faculties of fine art programs. In a letter to The Listener a student who has suffered under this system shows the resentment one might expect of someone with the wit to question it. Of the acolytes' tutors he says: "They ignore the problems these students will face outside the college ... favoured students will re-enter the college as tutors without ever having to face these problems, and will add to the confusion by passing on these prejudices to a new generation of students whilst deluding themselves that they are mature, practising artists. I feel that this is part of the explanation for so much second-rate art and so many confused and frustrated ex-art students."[1]

And who could have put it better? The system continued into the seventies, where there appeared no philosophy comparable with that of the Pop culture and indeed no identifiable 'movements' of any comparable magnitude or importance, and so into the eighties when at long last there is every sign of a fundamental reappraisal of the modern movement. And the clearest sign is the growing disenchantment of so many students over the past few years.

Although some of the earlier installations made on this system were older men now approaching retirement, there are significantly more, who, as has been pointed out, received their training during the sixties and early seventies, and who are much affecting the curriculum and attitudes prevalent at the contemporary school. For the reasons given above, they will be largely unequipped to deal with this re-appraisal, and students

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1. N. Kubicki. Letter to The Listener. 1.2.1979, p.193.

with feelings like those expressed above pose a severe threat to their tutors: more and more they are refusing to have their qualitative judgement held at bay; more and more they demand to be taught specific skills which their tutors themselves have not learnt; more and more they aspire to the mastery of specifics which their tutors were taught to look upon as of no consequence and for which they never strove.* These tutors find themselves in an uncomfortable position and expend a great deal of energy on moves to confound and avert such developments. So it seems appropriate to ask why it is that the desires referred to above, to the mystification of some tutors and the alarm of others, have so markedly reasserted themselves in the new generation of students.

Also it is important to recognise, as I hope other parts of this essay have helped to do, in just what difficulties students of this persuasion find themselves in terms of the other controlling forces operative in the art world; these give every appearance of being in conspiracy with their tutors to withhold from them what they believe they ought to get.

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* With regard to the extent of student anger at what they consider an inadequate education, I also had access to some interesting statistics on a recent trip to North America. The province of Ontario conducted a survey of student opinion whose results underwrite the impression created by such letters. Some published facts, the results of this survey instigated by the ministry of Colleges and Universities, will speak for themselves:
When students were asked about possible changes that could be made to improve the teaching program, the most frequently mentioned items were:

- Instructors need to be more knowledgeable in terms of teaching certain art techniques (21% of survey respondents)
- More advanced and more specialised training (16%)
- More practical in terms of studio time and more emphasis on skills and techniques (15%)
- Orient the program more to the market and the actual working situation.

The survey also notes that "60% of the fine arts graduates have taken employment-related courses since graduation - more than any other program area studied."[1] Which, in plain English, means that they were unable to make a living and had to train all over again. That there are always some casualties - students who for one reason or another are unable to fulfil their initial intentions, who find they have chosen wrongly and enter some other field, or who simply do not make it, is nothing new. But when the proportion reaches sixty per cent one must look for other reasons.

[1] Published by A.R.A. Consultants, Toronto, February 1980, p.37.

Under the sort of system inspired by the notions of 'camp' and instant success, the urge towards mastery of technique could hardly be described as irresistible. This urge has been further dampened over the past ten years by the introduction of more notions that make it appear to be of no consequence in the study of art - notions like 'conceptualism' and the fads of 'documentation' and 'autobiography' now taking up so much of the curriculum in contemporary schools. Students in sufficient number seem to find such pursuits engrossing enough to keep these schools afloat, though there is so much evidence that this is changing that the schools would be foolish to ignore it.*

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* A visit to an important and thriving college, the Ontario College of Art in Toronto, elicited the following history. In the early sixties, when colleges of art in North America were much given to these impulses, a star of the London firmament would be imported with a view to bringing the college into line with international developments. This was achieved in many cases by dispensing with most objective instruction and replacing it with activities considered to be more appropriate to the bracing climate then prevailing. (Symbolised in this case by the ceremonial smashing of the school's admirable collection of plaster casts and the destruction of its huge collection of still-life objects.) Many institutions found themselves thus transformed, and a good many mature teachers were disposed of. This college, however, did not submit in its entirety to this rejuvenation. It was finally allowed that a core of the older members of staff be retained, and the school was split into distinct sections to be called "Fine Art" and "Experimental Art". The Fine Art section was to continue to pursue such activities as figure drawing, easel painting, print-making and so forth, while the Experimental section would cater for all the 'exciting' new activities for which additional staff, of the same persuasion as the London star, were hired, and a spacious building acquired and equipped. At the time, student enrolment in both sections was about equal, which perhaps indicates a sobriety in the youth of Toronto not evident elsewhere. Ten years later the situation was very different and shows no signs of reverting: the Fine Art section is so inundated with applicants, that only the best are chosen, producing an astonishing standard of work; the experimental rooms are all but empty, despite canvassing amongst the first years by the lecturers who run it. The 'Fine Art' section of this same college is also drawing students who have withdrawn from a nearby university, where the facilities are mind-boggling and the program very progressive. In so doing they forfeit their degrees and so diminish their chances of teaching jobs.

For the urge has begun to assert itself in the quarter apparently least expected by these schools - in the students themselves. And there must, one hopes, be some amongst the teachers at such schools who ask themselves why this should be so. Perhaps it is because the new generation of students cannot bring themselves to look upon art as a sort of sophisticated game, which is one way of describing the outlook their tutors acquired during their training in the sixties, however refined or daring the game is made to appear. Perhaps this alarming new attitude (which is in fact not new at all, but an ancient one which appears for whatever reasons to have lain dormant for some time) may be seen as a re-affirmation of the belief that education consists in the initiation of others into worthwhile activities. Perhaps these young people cannot bring themselves to regard what is being passed on to them as in any way worthwhile, either intrinsically or instrumentally. That they cannot get jobs or make any kind of living (excepting the lucky few who are absorbed into the teaching system) may appear to many of them the immediate cause for their grievances. But it is also evident that it goes deeper than this, that the infinitely more important consideration is of intrinsic criteria. The students are unable to look upon the game they are expected to play, and the artefacts it produces, as having any intrinsic worth at all, quite apart from its ability to make some people a handsome living.

What is it about subjects like the arts that produces the urge towards mastery? The quality of dynamism, so irrevocably rooted in Western culture, and which distinguishes its art from the great art systems of the East, surely has a lot to do with this, as with other characteristics of our culture.

Paul Johnson sums up the quality:

> "Dynamism implants an urge to perfectionism in the western artist, and compels him never to rest content with his modes of expression ... (and it) creates extraordinary levels of achievement. But dynamism is also a destructive quality, for it compels the artist to smash his creative moulds as fast as he creates them. He is constantly bursting through the artistic limitations and disciplines he himself has imposed at an earlier stage, and moving forward like an uncontrollable machine into unknown territory, often to aesthetic disaster."[1]

There have been such areas of disaster, where in some way or another this quality of dynamism has become corrupted, perhaps into a quest for mere novelty, perhaps attaining tyrannical proportions for some other reason. But these have been followed by periods of regeneration, frequently characterised by some sort of return to criteria of earlier times which appear in themselves irrefutable, appear to promise art of irrefutable intrinsic worth. However this may be, it is a quality discernible in all the great movements, and as much as it was this which in part gave impetus to the Pop culture, it may be this which is reasserting itself amongst the present generation in a way which causes them to rebel against the received attitudes of modernism. Certainly the universal passion for the artefacts of the past which has caused the most trivial 'antiques' to become articles of great value is indicative of some reversal of values, something more, perhaps than mere nostalgia for times when permanence was a reliable part of daily life. Though indubitably it is tied up with this longing, this despair at the transience of modern life, which has

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1. Paul Johnson 'Enemies of Society' Weidenfeld & Nicholson 1977, p.213.

stamped our art as surely as everything else.

If the students, like so many others, wish for something of more permanent value, something less redolent of a game in the art they aspire to, what is it that makes them wish for this? What is it about activities like art, literature, science, philosophy that makes us view them so differently from what we consider more trivial activities, and that makes the mastery of them such a powerful aspiration? Why are the students, of all people, showing such unmistakable signs of insistence upon this distinction? Perhaps it is because their imaginations have rebelled at the limitations of what they have for so long been offered - the restricted objective, the absence of challenge, the finality of such sparse content, the absence of material and the absence of struggle with it. And finally perhaps they cannot any longer be convinced that such activities as they are offered can in any way be called pursuit of truth. For the rules have for so long been made entirely from within (Richard Cork's "incestuous debate") that, in the nature of a sophisticated game, the objectives by which the standards are set have become entirely invented objectives, as arbitrary as those of chess or cricket, but, unlike their rules, subject to perpetual fiddling. Art has become classifiable as a game, because by and large its ends are morally unimportant. What these students are objecting to, I believe, is the manifest absence of cognitive content and the infinite complexity which ought to distinguish art from more trivial activities. They cannot attain any confidence in its practice, for, as has been suggested earlier, why should being able to do what appears to need no particular skill, and which therefore most others can do, inspire confidence?

Secondly, they are unable to take it seriously, because they cannot see it as illuminating other areas of their lives or contributing much to the quality of living. (Eliot's view of High Culture.)

In Peters' view, what distinguishes the curricular activities of High Culture from games (however sophisticated) and other more trivial activities, is in fact this matter of end, or objective. While the argument acknowledges the similarity to games, in that such activities are, in High Culture, pursued for their own sake, it insists that they are so much more than games. "For truth" he declares "is not an object that can be attained; it is an aegis under which there must always be progressive development. To discover something, to falsify the views of one's predecessors, necessarily opens up fresh things to be discovered, fresh hypotheses to be falsified. There must therefore be unending opportunities for fresh discrimination and judgement and the development of further skills."[1]

It seems obvious that if this is the view of art to which we subscribe, we cannot do without skill (as opposed to knack) and on entering upon its study must aspire to mastery, if we are to be equipped to pursue it. The plastic arts, in the traditional sense, lie somewhere between the arts of music and literature in terms of their intent. For if, as Peters points out, "it might be argued that literature and poetry, for instance, are developments of a dimension of awareness of the world ... other arts, like music, may be creating, as it were, another world to be aware of."[2] I think that this neat proposal has something of the truism in it. Do not all art forms contain elements of both characteristics, albeit in the varying proportions which prompt such definitions? The plastic arts unarguably and in the face of all that has been said and done in the past thirty years stubbornly continue to display both these properties wherever they produce memorable results. And the student is perfectly justified who argues that he cannot create worlds to be aware of, if his awareness of the world is so restricted in terms of visual mastery, if he is denied the pursuit of mastery of specific skills which he sees as indispensable to such creations.

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[1] R.S. Peters 'Ethics and Education'. Unwin Univ. Books 1977, p.158.
[2] Ibid. p.163.

"Teaching requires us to reveal our reasons to the student and, by so doing, to submit them to his evaluation and criticism ... to throw a child into the river is not to teach him how to swim."[1] That the children should have come to realise this, and resent it, after so much floundering, should not surprise us.

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[1] I. Scheffler. The Language of Education. Thomas (Springfield, Illinois) 1960, p.58.

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5. AUTONOMY AND THE CURRICULUM

If we grant that there are students in sufficient number, to warrant our serious consideration, who demand something fundamentally different from that which they are almost universally offered, then we should consider not only why they are demanding it, but also whether and how we should oblige them. And the first way of doing this must be to consider what ought to be on their program of studies, where they are right and where they may be wrong in their expectations. The modern liberalistic curriculum is much given to grandiose injunctions to students of which the following, drawn from the handbook of a prominent North American university Fine Arts program, are fairly typical: the students are to "perform apart from historical precedents and beyond present preconceptions", to "examine art from new vantage points", to "invent a range of possible approaches" and to produce "unfamiliar processes of the student's own devising".[1] This program, in common with many others, allows six hours per week in the studio, and in practice much of this studio time is devoted to debate of one kind or another.

The student might very well retort that he cannot be expected to perform apart from historical precedents which he has not been in a position to grasp, or examine art from new vantage points before fully understanding the traditional vantage points, much less invent approaches to something he has had insufficient opportunity to absorb in the first place. For to invent new approaches devolves ipso facto on a thorough understanding of existing approaches; to perform apart from historical precedents

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1. Visual Arts Handbook 1980-81, York University, Toronto pp.15-19.

involves a thorough grasp of such precedents; to examine art from new vantage points assumes that it has been thoroughly examined from a conventional one - all of which will absorb a great deal of time, and cannot realistically be suggested to students in their second year (of six hours in the studio per week). Equally, to devise new and unfamiliar processes on the basis of such sketchy familiarity as the young student has with existing processes is a proposition of dubious worth. Some of these students might with justification feel that they should be a little closer to being equal to existing processes, approaches and vantage points before being expected to produce alternatives. For this in itself is an action which implies preferences, which in turn involves value judgements for which they might well feel that they have insufficient basis.

In short, the student may want a lot more substance than he is getting before he will become genuinely interested in, or be able to cope in an able and informed manner with such ideas. But there is more than this to his objections.

One of the common features of the letters of the kind I quoted earlier, and of the objections elicited by talking to students, is a distaste for the insistence upon egocentric inquiry which characterises such programs. Such students wish to spend more time and energy upon the making of an object than on discussions about their motives and moods. Common also is an air of outraged reason; they object to being expected to pursue with earnest intent activities which appear to them to have no rational basis - if their teachers are following Scheffler's edict (to submit their reasons to the student's evaluation and criticism) the student is finding them unconvincing. As much as such an instructor might call upon the rationality of the student to justify what he has made,* others will encourage him to perform without recourse to rationality, implying that it is in some way a hindrance to true expression. We need express no surprise at the intelligent student's objection to this, only at the time it took in coming to light. Perhaps the philosophy of 'camp' has had a more powerfully seductive or intimidating grip than one imagined.

What these students are demanding is that they be offered an education and training which will give them the autonomy with which to decide their own futures; and it is a reasonable demand. For surely some sort of autonomy must be the logical objective if any process is to be termed education or training. Autonomy in the social sense of freedom of expression is only one meaning of the word, and the one upon which we congratulate ourselves most frequently, contrasting our own position with that of artists of earlier times. The autonomy with which the student ought to be concerned might very well be translated as 'mastery';

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* I discovered, on extensive visits to schools in the U.K. and North America, that it was common practice for students and their tutor to spend an entire morning discussing what might have taken an hour or two to make. After I had attended several such discussions it also became clear that what was being tested was the inventive powers involved, not in the practical sphere of making the object under discussion, but in the elucidation of moods, motives and emotions which hoped to lend validity to what generally appeared to have been made in a random fashion. The urge toward inventive after-the-act rationale also seems to occupy a good deal of review space in the art journals where some reviewers expend by far the greater portion of the review of speculation about the motives for what the artist has done, and on the associations which it has provoked in the reviewer's mind. Much less attention is paid to the work's other qualities, and perhaps not surprisingly, considering how much may be said about such things as rooms filled with earth and holes dug in the ground, that is consistent with an appearance of intelligent assessment.

it consists in the accumulation and development of self-reliant skill, the refining of the sensibilities and the cultivation of the mind, and adds up to a matter of capacity.

The liberalist or 'spontaneous' mode of self-discovery seems to be based upon the assumption that autonomy can be granted in this sense as it can in the social sense, when according to the opposing argument, it must be acquired or achieved. Before the student may be launched on the path of 'self-determination' which the modern curriculum so often seeks to encourage, he must grow toward the understanding, the cognitive awareness and the knowledge thus accumulated which would justify any course of action one could reasonably regard as 'self-determining'. That this ideal of self-determination is not a particularly convincing one unless it is combined with rationality, is demonstrated in the number of students who sooner or later reject it. This often happens only after they have entered the outside world and the ideal collapses, as indeed it must, for it suggests a world in which no one is answerable to anybody or anything but themselves, a not very compelling dream, in all conscience, and one soon proven in that outside world to be unfulfillable. The ideal suggested earlier, of artists creating works of art independent of any precedent, might be considered desirable by some. But the proviso must be added, if the ideal is to generate anything of positive value, that such independent thinking and questioning as such endeavours demand be well-informed and ably performed, or the whole idea is in danger of being reduced to idle whim and random preference. And it is in the manifest absence of this proviso that the ideal fails to convince students that they are learning anything of value, or will be able to create distinctive works of art.

A distinction was suggested earlier between the concepts of 'training' and 'education'. The proviso in the last paragraph calls for some sort of balance between the two, and perhaps it is this question of what consititutes a healthy balance on the curriculum that provides one of the most fundamental areas of disagreement amongst art instructors.

For the sake of the argument, I propose two extreme views (if either were in fact practised for long, it must provoke a breakdown). At one extreme there is the school of thought embodied in the quotation at the start of this essay ("We can't teach these kids anything etc.") where the tutor disclaims all responsibility and insists that intuitive originality is the only value in art - an attitude which precludes any form of training. At the other extreme is the rigidly traditionalist school which places all the emphasis on training according to set procedures and at the expense of individual solutions, so that, as Peters puts it: "The quest has begun to falter when it gets into the hands of those who are wedded to a rigid methodology."[1]

Both approaches, even though they seldom if ever take such extreme form for long, fail to acknowledge the interdependence of the two concepts of 'education' and 'training' in preparing students in the visual arts. Neither of them could really be said to be possible without some recourse to the other .

In fact it is hard to draw any but the most arbitrary division between the sort of specialised education and the training traditionally offered for the arts, and it may not be wise to try. Even when they can be seen to be in some sense distinct, such as in 'how to prepare a ground for oil painting' and 'what makes us regard Giotto as a genius', it seems rash to promote one at the expense of the other. For without reference to its context, no training in, say, painting, can have much profound meaning to its recipient in terms of how he will use it. Reference to context at once calls upon his education, both specifically artistic and in the wider sense. Equally, those 'educational' aspects of the student's course of study which induce growth of the mind in its appreciative capacity must remain partially perceived where there is inadequate understanding of the means; no link, as it were, between the mind and the hand.

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[1] R.S. Peters, op.cit. p.158.

The hand trained to high degrees of skill, and the mind educated to high degrees of excellence in the appreciation of it, refine the sensibilities which direct them. At the same time the hand and mind are capable of a more lucid reflection of these sensibilities. In the situation where there is a general excellence of those qualities which result from intensive training and prolonged practice of mind, eye and hand, the sensibilities have free play and the student with distinctive statements to make will do so with authority.

There arises another and similar area of disagreement where, in practice, schools will have to agree on their own criteria. This is the problem of deciding at what stage of his course, and to what degree at any given stage, the student should be granted autonomy. (This again may in some cases tend to restrict the meaning of the word, in the minds of those disagreeing, to the social sense.) Here, there are also widely differing points of view, the extremes of which may be seen as different ways of agreeing or disagreeing about the granting of autonomy in the first place. At one end of the scale there is the view that grants complete autonomy from the outset and sees the ideal student as that mythical creature who has been 'self-determining' from infancy. The other extreme view holds, as we have seen, that there is no such thing as even relative or progressive autonomy for the student, and that it is the prerogative of the professional. It seems abundantly clear to me that neither of these rulings will do, for both restrict the meaning of the word to suit their own case. If the first view were put into practice, which, not surprisingly, it is not, not only would it beg the entire question of teaching, but those professing it would, amongst others, have to seek an alternative way of making a living. If the other extreme view were put into practice to its logical conclusion in present-day circumstances, it might conceivably suit some students of dubious mental health, but would before long enrage a good many others beyond the point where they would endure it.

There can be only one answer, in my view, to this whole question of autonomy, in any sense of the word. And that is that autonomy cannot in reality be granted at all. Rather it must be conceded when the individual displays it, and in a degree to correspond with the degree in which he displays it. (That this process is, in an art training at any rate, inevitably of a progressive rather than a final nature, and at stages instrumental in purpose rather than intrinsic, need not hinder the argument for now.) For if the student does display the authority conducive to such autonomy in a given sphere, it cannot consistently or for long be withheld without provoking justifiable rebellion.* If he has not acquired the authority, to thrust autonomy upon him, with all its responsibilities and demands, will at the very least confuse him. For if he has not yet an artistic identity compatible with autonomy this might drive him to assume one. Experience has shown that he will probably turn to aping what others put forward as original, and the easier it appears to him, the more likely he is to adopt it. To put it bluntly, he will soon be paging through 'Studio International' or 'Art in America', and by producing something derivative of what he sees displayed there, will probably convince himself, for a time at least, that he has joined the vanguard of the modern movement. The very universality of this reaction should dissuade anyone inclined to dismiss it as indicative of a lack of individuality (for on a different level of course, it is an ill-considered attempt to assert that individuality). It is a perfectly understandable reaction, and it takes a singularly clear-sighted student, if his peers are doing this to the approval of their tutors, to escape being seduced into competing with them for attention.

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* There is an argument, deserving of attention, that such rebellion can in itself be of value, and that the provocation of it can be seen as a positive policy.

The argument so far has talked of autonomy, or more correctly the authority which prompts us to concede it, as though it were something which arrived, as it were, in one piece, which of course it does not, instead of by degrees and at pretty-well unpredictable intervals, which it does. None-the-less, if we continue to use the word 'autonomy' in the sense of qualified and informed self-government, as opposed to the looser meaning of the word, then it is at this point that the faction which insists that autonomy is the natural possession of the artist or aspiring artist must, quite simply, be dropped from the argument. For their view also precludes the idea of a progressive autonomy, and their meaning of the word is of no more use in this discourse, which must now turn directly to the substance of the curriculum.

The argument put forward so far has been couched elsewhere in different terms with ultimately much the same sort of conclusion in respect of its implications in the shaping of the art curriculum. One such, postulated by Ernst Fischer, is worth quoting at some length at this point.

> "Man's desire to be increased and supplemented indicates that he is more than an individual. He feels that he can attain wholeness only if he takes possession of the experiences of others that might potentially be his own. Yet what a man apprehends as his potential includes everything that humanity as a whole is capable of. Art is the indispensable means for this merging of the individual with the whole. It reflects his infinite capacity for association, for sharing experiences and ideas. And yet: is this definition of art as a means of becoming one with the whole of reality, as the individual's way to the world at large, as the expression of his desire to identify himself with what he is not, perhaps too romantic? Is it not rash to conclude, on the basis of our own near-hysterical sense of identification with the hero of a film or novel, that this is the universal and original function of art? Does art not also contain the opposite of this 'Dionysian' losing of oneself? Does it not also contain the 'Apollonian' element of entertainment and satisfaction which consists precisely in the fact that the onlooker does not identify himself with what is represented but gains distance from it, overcomes the direct power of reality through its deliberate representation, and finds, in art, that happy freedom of which the burdens of everyday life deprive him? And is not the same duality - on the one hand the absorption in reality, on the other the excitement of controlling it -

also evident in the way the artist himself works? For make no mistake about it, work for an artist is a highly conscious, rational process at the end of which the work of art emerges as mastered reality - not at all a state of intoxicated inspiration.

In order to be an artist it is necessary to seize, hold, and transform experience into memory, memory into expression, material into form. Emotion for an artist is not everything; he must also know his trade and enjoy it, understand all the rules, skills, forms, and conventions whereby nature - the shrew - can be tamed and subjected to the contract of art. The passion that consumes the dilettante serves the true artist: the artist is not mauled by the beast, he tames it.

Tension and dialectical contradiction are inherent in art; not only must art derive from an intense experience of reality, it must also be constructed, it must gain form through objectivity. The free play of art is the of mastery."[1]

(The emphases are Fischer's own)

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1. Ernst Fischer 'The Necessity of Art' Penguin Books 1963 pp 8-9.

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6. THE CURRICULUM I

The Fundamentals

If we accept the argument proposed so far, that progression towards autonomy be the logical goal of education or training in a particular sphere, and if we accept the parallel proposal that as authority is demonstrated in particular areas, so a degree of autonomy may be conceded in those areas, we face at once a practical difficulty. This is the matter of recognising such authority as it shows itself. It need not be stressed that teachers themselves must be possessed of authority in the field in question, if they are to recognise it in others. The real difficulty invariably arises when a number of teachers is involved, as in any institutionalised teaching of art, and questions of advancement must be settled. There may be areas in every school in which, in theory at least, there need be no great difficulty about arriving at agreement. This is usually the case amongst teachers within a specialised sphere where such questions as at what stage a student be permitted to use costly materials, for instance, need not arouse excessive contention. But the matter of the student's general development in artistic terms is usually one for debate and disagreement and gives rise to a great variety of proposed course structures. As we are concerned with art schools, which necessarily consist of broad groupings of individuals into a system of classes and years, and not with the simple master-pupil situation, we have to attempt some kind of policy which encourages workability. So we are faced with questions which by their nature often ought to be asked about the individual, but about which in practice we have to make decisions of general applicability, and which promise maximum advantage to the individuals that make up the class.

The policies thus arrived at seek to respect the declared objective on the one hand, and the individuality of the student on the other. We have already considered in what ways some policies could be said to be counter-educational, in that one attitude might persuade the student that art is easy, and another that it is prescriptive. Various policies have emerged in attempts to solve this question. Most of them come down to the matter of determining two things. Firstly, there is the question of the duration of a particular period within which it is agreed that a student ought to command a given range of abilities, which then qualifies him to enter a further stage. Secondly, there is the design of these stages - the breaking down of the learning process into distinct 'subjects', each of which is given a particular importance relative to program-time and pass requirements. And with regard to the early years of the course, the following approaches may be discerned:

1. The policy which insists upon a foundation course, mandatory to all students, in all its subjects, and the only access to further study. The principle of the foundation course rests upon the idea that a certain spectrum of knowledge and skills is pre-requisite to specialisation in any chosen direction, and, in fact, to being in a position to choose. The nature of this foundation course will vary from school to school according to precept. One sort of school would present the students with a program of solid drawing and very little beside, because they regard drawing as the supreme and in fact only foundation for any study in the plastic arts, and see to it that as much as possible is done right away. Another sort of school would consider such things as the fundamentals of design and colour coordination just as important, and cut the drawing time to accommodate this. But generally these schools would agree that what they are all doing is initiating the student into areas of knowledge that

they consider fundamental - a sort of probationary pre-schooling.

It might be commented that such schools are subject-centred (though I do not think, fairly) while those described below are student-centred (which is neither entirely fair). For the first tends to choose its students on the strength of their performance, while the second is concerned with the student's choice of direction and how best to guide it.

2. The policy, perhaps more common than the first, which looks upon the first year as one of orientation - the student is here introduced to a variety of 'subjects' with a view to leading him to an educated choice for specialisation. The system has two benefits. Firstly, it illustrates to the student his affinities for certain spheres through mandatory exercises in a range of spheres, and so aids his choice of direction. Secondly, it demonstrates these affinities to his tutor, who may encourage and advise him accordingly. It has as its justification the assumption that the most important function of the introductory year is to 'orientate' the student, by which is usually meant, to make him aware of his personal capacities and inclinations, and thus inescapably looks upon the student of the first year as a slightly more mature being than does the alternative view - which holds that he ought first to be 'formed' by a given quantity of knowledge and degree of skill before being permitted or required to 'orientate' himself.

3. The most common form of introductory year is usually the second, containing elements of the first. For of course, as a rule, such choices are made after a concerted period of instruction in the range of subject directions. So we arrive at what might be called a foundation/orientation year, and sometimes is. There are, naturally, conflicts which arise out

of this attempt to combine what are essentially different undertakings, different assumptions about the maturity or identity of the first year student, different ways of appraising the activity we call Fine Art. System 1 tends to regard art first as a vast and complex body of knowledge to which the student must labour to gain access. System 2 tends to regard it as something that is in us and must be drawn out. System 3 recognises that both are true and neither wholly true and attempts to answer both needs. In this it might recommend itself most widely.

The duration of the introductory period will also vary amongst these types of schools - the probationary approach tends towards a longer introductory period, the orientation approach towards a shorter, while in the combined type there will be debate back and forth. But there is in my view a consideration more important than when we arrive at the moment of specialisation, and that is how we manage that specialisation. One aspect of managing this is something most schools of at least two of these types have in common. They have recourse to those disciplines which are generally thought to be of benefit to all directions of specialisation and are thus frequently mandatory studies parallel to all these courses throughout the years that follow. The two subjects most commonly used in this sense are History of Art and Drawing. Each indisputably serves an aspect of the student's development; one, as it were, teaches him to see, the other to understand what he is seeing. That each is very much more than this may be limited at this point to noting the other great quality each possesses in terms of education, and that is their intrinsic worthwhileness.

The faction which insists upon automatic autonomy, insists that "it is art because I say it is" must (if they are consistent, which they seldom are) have dispensed with these encumbrances to the unbridled self-expression that seems to be their aim in performing 'apart from any historical precedent'. The mandatory position of these subjects on most programs after the first year is based on the continuing assumption that some accumulative objective learning must be part of the premise for any venture into self-expression, and should continue to inform it for several years of training. Both disciplines set criteria by which we judge such ventures 'well-informed' and 'ably performed' in the first place, and through the body of knowledge they build up, distinctive in the second place. That such criteria may prove extremely elastic in practice is one thing and unavoidable, but to argue that either discipline and the standards it generates are irrelevant to education in art is quite another.* The presence of these mandatory subjects on the curriculum effectively counteracts the limiting of the student's perceptions to his specialised sphere, and at the same time is held to enhance his performance in that sphere. It does this, in one sense, by elevating into an education what might otherwise have remained mere training.

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* There are many institutions which have dispensed with objective and continual drawing classes in the traditional sense. I have been an observer at classes which were designated on the curriculum as 'drawing' but where nothing I recognised as drawing was in progress. Concepts were debated, objects moved about, actions of one kind or another performed, and so forth. If such activities have any benefit, it must be of a fundamentally different nature from that proposed by the pursuit of traditional drawing classes. If there are any schools of professional standing which have similarly altered the meaning of 'History of Art', I have not come across them. One usually finds that schools which have allowed the above approach to drawing also display a proliferation of theory courses of all kinds which, though they may frequently appear to have little connection with the appreciation of history of art in the traditionally understood sense, do have in common with it at least the declared instrumental value of stimulating the mind and provoking thought.

Peter Lloyd Jones reports, however, that further student 'freedom' has been achieved in the UK by in many instances making History of Art optional instead of mandatory. A step which he and many with him, regard as an educational retreat.*

* Lloyd-Jones, P. Art Students and their Troubles. Leonardo Vol. 8 No. 1, Winter 1975.

As the note to the last paragraph suggests, much of what passes for 'theory' on the modern curriculum tends to usurp territory previously thought to be more effectively traversed in the practical field. Equally, much of what passes for practical activity has degenerated into prolonged talking about it. Though it seems obvious to me that in a drawing class students should draw, and that we should clearly define for ourselves just what is and what is not drawing if it is to be valuable as a discipline, recent developments in other directions compel me to make a case for it.

Drawing taught in the traditional way seems to me to be far more valuable than any amount of talking about it, or any amount of activity in its place that could at the very most be considered an extension of the 'concept' of drawing, and this on several counts:

1. First of all, drawing, in the sense of making images, is the most accessible activity on the student's program. Here his perceptive powers may be measured in terms of performance according to definite practical demands. When the student's perception is directed toward a designated object, such as a model on a dais, standards of perception may be readily demonstrated. An arm or a nose in his drawing may be shown to be too big or too small or otherwise unconvincing, before it may be shown to be inexpressive or insensitive or whatever else we expect from the more advanced drawing. In other words, under this system progression is always visible and ordered, and therefore always measurable by both student and tutor in terms of the student's development. It thus

has great instrumental value in the sense of instilling habits of persistence and learning in the search that is to lead to authoritative expression.

2. Such future expression is also founded upon an immense vocabulary of forms which the student's growing perceptions continue to refine and build upon.

3. Drawing has already been proposed as the supreme bridging and testing interdisciplinary activity, and in the practical aspect of this consideration it provides material upon which to base the standards by which we judge the student's progress, both in its application to his chosen sphere and in his development as an artist.

4. Finally there is its intrinsic value. Apart from providing ready access to forms and ideas in both their exploration by the student and their critical evaluation by the tutor, drawing is of course in itself an art form. The products of this class must be contemplated by their makers not only as exercises, but also as works of art. This enjoins us to a mode of assessment peculiar to our sphere of activity, and quite distinct from the way in which we assess other activities. Thus, in contrast to the theory class and other activities which might replace it, drawing may never be regarded as either a technical exercise only, or an intellectual exercise, only, which is something that might fairly be levelled at those activities which so frequently displace it on the modern curriculum. These arguments clearly favour the presence on the curriculum of drawing in the objective, traditional sense, as something to be continuously followed by all students. They propose it as an activity quite as valuable, both intrinsically and extrinsically, as the history and

appreciation of art, and surely more direct and telling from all points of view than any amount of conjecture in the theory classes which are so often seen to be in its place. For conjecture at the drawing board takes on the intent of producing art, while conjecture away from it merely talks about art.

To those who quarrel with the use of the word 'conjecture' in the last paragraph, and who would retort that theory about the making of images may not be written off as speculative, I say that they are partly right, for it may not. Indeed much of it has been proposed by great artists, as well as others recognised as authoritative in the field, who would protest that their theories had been evolved by soundly empirical or logical means. At the same time, it is possible to see the image as fact, and the theory as an idea about it, and therefore at a remove from it. As such it is inescapably less precise, less subject to refutation, less definitive than the image itself. This is why it is hard to see how, in the limited time imposed by the curriculum of any institution, theorizing about an activity can be considered more valuable or at least as valuable as the activity itself - which it would have to be, to justify substituting it for that activity. It is hard to escape the suspicion, though in my experience they have not come right out and said it, that a good many contemporary schools do consider theorizing more valuable than the activities it examines, seeing how much of the original activities is dropped from the program to accommodate it. That there is a rich variety of worthwhile theory about art is true - indeed we might spend many years at an art school and never cover all the soundest examples of such theorizing about image-making and its implications, and yet it does seem obvious that the making of images must be the first concern of the art student. There is also no doubt that the presence on the curriculum of excessive amounts of theory does present a platform for pursuasion to a particular point of view, which may sway young people by the selection of those theories that suit it. There will always be some available, to almost any point of view, persuasive enough to divert the ingenuous. It is not persuasion to a point of view I am attacking here, for that is ubiquitous and inevitable. But I do point to the conflict with the principle of self-determination and automatic autonomy upon which such curricula claim to have their foundation.

It may be that it is necessary to reiterate an obvious truth when we are considering the ratio of theory to image-making on our curriculum: the image is the ultimately definitive and conclusive form of the artistic idea. And I make special issue of this ratio between theorizing and drawing because I have observed that where traditional disciplines are cut to make way for new forms of teaching, it is drawing that is the hardest hit. Almost invariably, the idea of 'extending' the concept of drawing, soon means changing the concept of drawing, and not just by extension, but by displacement. The same objections apply elsewhere, though I think that no discipline should be quite as carefully considered with regard to its dispensability as drawing. For what is at a remove from drawing by its theoretical nature has in many instances invaded the drawing class and has become the main activity there: much of what is designated on the curriculum as drawing in practice turns out to be discourse of one kind or another. This involves not only the expounding by tutors of established theory, of which there is sufficient to keep the student from his drawing for some time, but also, and one suspects more regularly, the tutor's own theories, and those of his (first or second year) students. This may even consist, taken to its democratic conclusion, in an exercise in producing theories constructed by tutor and class - a nod, perhaps, in the direction of self-determination - and it almost inevitably degenerates into idle conjecture.

In the midst of this confusion where acts, actions and activities, theory, theorizing and conjecture all form part of the amorphous proceedings that have replaced the traditional drawing class, I think we would do well to remember that the image is the one phenomenon to which the artist's sensibilities are most closely attuned. It is his supreme form of communication, his most conclusive means of expression, his most valued possession. In every way it must speak to him most directly and inform him most keenly. If we cannot assume this about the student of the plastic arts, I believe we shall have little to say to him. It is under curricula which have replaced the constant of objective, disciplined drawing with the vaguer activities alluded to above, that there is a marked absence of the authority one would expect in the more senior students. Their work often shows the immaturity one would associate with much younger students suffering a lapse of tutorial control. For the new activities exert no governing impetus on the student's growth, provide no touchstone for measuring his progress. Instead they place the student's immature fancy at the centre of things, leading him to a poor regard for that which first gave him cause for wonder and delight. Their capacity for hypothesis notwithstanding, these students are imprisoned in myopic, self-obsessed ignorance, which comes all too clearly to the fore when some of them opt at a late stage for some form of figurative art. They have acquired a narrowly esoteric visual language, but in terms of phenomenological insight they are dispossessed mendicants. Many of them only realise or admit this some time after they have been given their degrees and by that time some of them are tutors themselves.

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7. THE CURRICULUM II

Considerations for the Advanced Curriculum

So much has been written and is constantly being said about what art ought to be, that the advanced student who begins to evince authority, and casts about for directives, is inevitably prey to profound confusion. So far we have considered what constitutes autonomy and attempted to establish how this may be genuinely attained - or rather how hindrances to this process might be avoided, particularly when they arise in the guise of a false autonomy, or an incomplete understanding of the concept of autonomy for the artist. I have hoped to show that any pursuit of autonomy must be grounded upon agreed criteria, or it will never be wholly convincing to either student or mentor, and certainly not to audience. I have hoped to show that while there is no suggestion that the audience should dictate what the artist should do, neither should they be held to be of no account in the matter of what he does. For if art is a contract, then the other party is the audience. Without such a contract, there can be no dialogue. This is the burden of the warnings that have been issued over the past decade and more, and which I have quoted at some length. It goes without saying that at no stage has what we think of as 'high art' been wholly dictated by the audience, or it must degenerate into cliché. The stimuli which have worked back and forth throughout our history have often appeared as a duel, some sort of conflict. But in every instance which has resulted in memorable art, there has been, ultimately, contact and nourishment in both directions, whatever the immediate anguish to either party.

In an era of singular conflict, the irony of our art is that by and large there is no real conflict where we most explicitly seek it. Some might explain this by pointing out that the lack arises because it is conflict for its own sake that is sought, rather than the pursuit of truth, which would give to such art goals with which the audience could identify. But there is more than this to the ultimate impotence of such images in modernist art.

Rookmaaker provides part of what I think is the explanation:

> "Formerly art was 'an art', just as we still speak of arts and crafts. Art as a higher function of mankind, the work of the inspired lofty artist, comparable to that of the poet or the prophet, was the outcome of the Renaissance with its neo-platonic way of thinking. Yet the fatal conclusions were only drawn later: the modern division between the fine arts - drama, poetry, literature, music, painting and sculpture and the applied arts such as pottery, tapestry and so on, is of fairly recent date. It was the outcome of a development in the theory of art at the end of the seventeenth century in academic and connoisseurs' circles. It was no accident that this coincided with the beginning ... of the Enlightenment. With the dichotomy of reality, the dualism between the realm of the sciences and the higher realm of freedom, 'cultural matters' and art were given a new task. Art became Art with a capital A, a high, exalted, more humanist than human endeavour. Yet precisely in that pseudo-religious function it became almost superfluous, something aside from reality and life, a luxury - fine, refined, but useless."[1]

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1. H.R. Rookmaaker 'Art and the Death of a Culture' Intervarsity Press, London, 1970, pp.230-231.

On the other hand, the Romantics have taught us to equate artistic expression with the freedom of the individual, who is active beyond civilized constraints and answerable first to himself. Here were the seeds of the myth of the anti-social artist - to have access to the full matrix of an experience might, it is proposed, demand a life-style which defies social control or approval. The modernist version of this idea has moved from the relatively innocuous belief that bohemia was the true metier for artistic genesis, to the notion that the true artist performs outside the constraints of rationality. Such is the dichotomy of modern artistic expression, to which we must add the proliferation of unintelligible 'languages' in which this expression is couched. The most consistently alienating aspect of the modern movement has been that it so often puts a question mark against the values and principles that have supported our society. The very factors which govern our reactions to provocative imagery, our cultural and moral landmarks, as it were, are first queried and then demolished, and art wanders off into the darkness without them. This is known amongst critics as 'weakened reference'.

An illustration of this weakened reference is that many images with an anarchistic message, which set out to revile or destroy what society has regarded as holy or otherwise reassuring, end up by turning their message of negation against themselves. For the celebration of such ideas in high art (as opposed to popular art where they might be effective) elicits a sophisticated response, and thus puts them as much as a remove from our emotions as it confronts us with them in permanent format: we may encounter works which revile what we hold sacred, and feel no particular anger, which mock what is solemn, and feel no regret and indeed no particular interest. So the reference of modernist art to the social condition has largely lost any meaning for contemporary man, primarily through art's negation of the very values upon which our reactions depend. The converse of all this is illustrated in the pathetic ineffectuality of modern propagandist art, or that which appeals to social conscience. The response we feel toward a Daumier is incomparably stronger than any elicited by his modern equivalent. Whatever the wider causes, there can be no period to equal ours for the sheer bankruptcy of religious art: the few very notable exceptions are prominent largely by virtue of their disassociation with modernism.* This is another instance of art attempting to fulfil what modernism insists is its first duty - relevance to its time - and ending up more or less impotent to affect our lives in any positive way. It is not a new observation that much of our art reflects our times only in its own confusion and dislocation - far from crystallizing our experiences, its discourse is diffuse if it answers them at all. I have attempted to show that a set of norms, whatever they might be, must be made available to the student and must in some reliable way govern his progress (and his tutor's assessment of that progress) if we are to make any measurable advancement towards autonomy. If the student is to have a chance against the multiplicity of assaults that will surely be made upon his individuality, he must be possessed of some kind of authority. None of the efforts to seek viable alternatives to realism as a basis for art training has done anything more than further divide the artist from his audience, further impede dialogue.

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* Manzu, for example.
Roualt springs to mind as a notable exception. His best work succeeds in accommodating both the traditional character of Christian art and the new character of the art of the twentieth century.

Whatever solutions are found, I have insisted, they must be found in the studio, for artistic values must be defended in the studio or nowhere. Equally, to produce art, truth must be pursued by individuals, whatever their recourse to the thought of their time, as it would appear that all distinctive art of the west has done. Somehow the artist must elicit some response from his audience over and above the recognition that he is of their time, for being 'of one's time' seems to have no particular merit in itself as a goal and need by no means be a condition, or we should have to dismiss the PRB as wholly unrepresentative of their time, and Bach of his.

(These examples might of course be argued, in that in another sense the PRB, for instance, was very much a phenomenon of the period, related to similar movements elsewhere in Europe, even though it arose in opposition to current values. And the answer to this must be that it is historical perspective which shows so clearly how such movements also made the period, in as much as they disrupted and diverted its processes. In the same way our own period must, in future hindsight, be perceived as being made by both what we think of as the mainstream and those movements which appear to contradict it. Thus any insistence that art should 'reflect' its period amounts to no more than a prescriptive limiting of art to conventional values, a denial of its essential freedom, its immortal capacity to surprise us, as it so often has in the past, by the burgeoning of new life where the prevailing values lead us least to expect it.)

Such considerations are far more something for the historians than something to be proposed as a goal for art students. For to propose this to them is possibly to deflect them from the pursuit of truth. They will probably attempt to do it by trying to fit themselves into whatever mode is fashionable, often in direct contradition of their genuine inclinations and at the expense of further learning. In my experience they will begin to lose confidence, and start operating in a way which hopes to conceal that they fear truth, lest it denounce them. It is clear that the student ought to be encouraged to pursue truth in and thorough a realm he understands. The better he understands that realm, the more refined his equipment, the greater his chances of reaching some truth that will nourish both himself and his audience. Philip Rawson has an apt metaphor:

> "One may reasonably assume that art calls for an independent literacy. Its content may be as varied as any other groups of language. It can talk about whatever it likes, on its own terms. The justification of any literacy is that it enables the literate to see, register, and integrate more of their worlds than the non-literate can. A language does not mirror passively; it is an active imaging of the world. We live the world as we understand it, cut up and assembled by the phenomenology conveyed in the languages of our culture. We capture our reality in nets of interpretation. A badly woven, coarse net catches less than a well-made one. A fine net of visual language enables us to comprehend the largest range possible within the physical and historical limitations of our life, for these limitations only circumscribe; they do not totally define."[1]

In short, the artist, if we undertake to educate him, ought to be made as literate as possible and as articulate as possible. Human ingenuity has not so far evolved a surer way of both initiation into and the testing of such literacy and articulation than the pursuit of phenomenological insight

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1. Philip Rawson. The Coarse Net and the Fine. Encounter April, 1981, p.60.

and the development of a visual language in which to express it. It seems obvious that any attempts to divert the student from these goals must have one overriding result: such attempts must hinder his ability to communicate. In this sense they are subversions of his artistic intent, which is his social contract and his salvation, the one thing his teachers should be at pains to nourish to a healthy growth; it is this that proffers invaluable contribution to the collective visual culture, and it is this that justifies the existence of art schools in the first place. So it should be preserved undefiled.

The notion that 'undefiled' can mean 'uninformed' is the sort of sentimentality that gives credence to programs which put the student at the centre of things and set him free in a sort of supermarket of educational wares. The utterly unfounded hope is that he will find the nourishment he needs. It is more than obvious by now that this has had quite the worst effect possible: child that he is, he has spurned the meat and vegetables, and gone for the junk food.

The simple way of saying all this is that whatever sphere of activity the student chooses to specialise in, be it painting, sculpture, etching or whatever else the school offers, his tutors ought to be concerned that he learn as much as possible about that sphere, as it exists, in the time available, if he is to have any worthwhile conception of its possibilities for experiment or innovation. It goes without saying that information can only be effectively conveyed where there is a common language in which all parties are thoroughly articulate, and if we insist upon keeping the existing language at bay by telling the student that the art of the past, however exquisite, has no relevance to his existence, we shall find it hard to teach him anything. The whole edifice of modernist art education rests very much on the idea that there is no language that is common to both the artist and his audience, only a sort of internal language for debate amongst artists and their critics, where intelligibility is suspect. This is why the population of the modernist school so often resembles a collection of mutes, each making unintelligible signals in an uncrackable code. The obduracy of their audience in rejecting this is not really surprising, the protestations of the fashionable set notwithstanding. They, we have cause to know, will do, say and even believe whatever seems necessary to give them the appearance of initiates, as long as they are seen doing it. If we set out to develop phenomenological insight, those of us who believe that this is part of our function as teachers of art, then we must speak about it in a language which has universal currency if we are to avoid the incestuous debate I have described. Secondly, the means we use should be as uncomplicated and methodical as possible. What I am suggesting here is the purely practical exercise of developing such insight by applying the language to familiar objects and situations: teach the student to see an orange, before asking him to 'symbolise oneness with the universe' or some such; teach him to use a pencil before giving him kinetic toys or computers, even if exposure to such devices is expected to benefit him later.

At times in our history the common visual language has become so dominant that it stifled the impulse towards phenomenological insight. At other times the pursuit of such insight at the expense of other considerations has produced a lifeless naturalism. Such developments have led the art school from time to time to regard teaching as the favouring of one need and the suppression of the other. It seems clear that while such imbalance will always be a probability, unless balance is consciously sought, the school fails to educate rather than merely train. Or its training inadequately subserves that education, and thus fails to equip the student for that distinctive, individual expression which the modern school so loudly and repeatedly announces as its goal. For the school to neglect either need is to enfeeble the art of its protegés. Feeble art generates feeble understanding, and the visual language that should provide the means of dialogue loses its meaning.

Those of us who teach in the modern school must be painfully aware of the visual illiteracy amongst our students that makes the job so difficult. And many of us will agree upon the factors in his upbringing which have brought this about: his schooling, where the patronising attitude towards art allows no application of what he learns in the art room to any other sphere; his exposure to debilitating mass-media; an aesthetically impoverished environment in which there is little to prompt visual literacy. I do not think it is an oversimplification to say that the present-day art curriculum deifies its internal language at the expense of phenomenological insight, and that this is the single most direct cause of the cliché-ridden work that one sees on student exhibitions the world over.

Add to this, that in many instances that language is of infantile narrowness in its range, often reduced to the sort of code I referred to earlier, and has no currency outside of the precious internal debate of the avant-garde, and it is not hard to see why the greater audience has rushed to embrace the various facile forms of 'realism' which have recently been attracting so much attention.

If the proper discourse of art is about human experience then the ersatz discourse of 'photo-realism' is a pallid substitute. Susan Sonntag has this to say about the place of photography in our culture:

> "The knowledge gained through still photographs will always be some kind of sentimentalism, whether cynical or humanist. It will be a knowledge at bargain prices - a semblance of knowledge, a semblance of wisdom; as the act of taking pictures is a semblance of appropriation, a semblance of rape. The very muteness of what is, hypothetically, comprehensible in photographs is what constitutes their attraction and provocativeness. The omnipresence of photographs has had an incalculable effect upon our ethical sensibility. By furnishing this already crowded world with a duplicate one of images, photography makes us feel that the world is more available than it really is."[1]

By quoting this passage I do not for a minute wish to suggest that nothing of value can come of such a movement, for it can and has. I do think that the sort of limitations Sonntag suggests will not suddenly fall away when we transfer the image to canvas. Most important of all in this context, they are the sort of limitations which render this idiom fairly useless as a medium for instruction. I have come across schools where the entire drawing experience of the students who believe they are 'into realism' has been the laborious tracing of photographic images. These students have never produced an image as a result of first-hand experience, and their entire artistic apprehension of reality is thus but a 'semblance of appropriation'.

I should make clear that I do not either for a minute underestimate the contribution the photograph has made to our imagery. Perhaps I should even stress the obvious truth that experienced painters are able to make informed and intelligent use of photographs. But I do not think we should imagine that this can be done by inexperienced students in any way that constitutes educational activity. If it promotes confidence in the student (this is one of the more fatuous apologies for the practice) it is a bogus and therefore shortlived confidence. For soon enough the student will see that almost any plodder with enough patience can do it. Despite the seductiveness of the proposition that art is as easy and unthinking as such activity is sure to be on the student level, some students must privately wonder how the laborious transference of an image from one medium into another may constitute an expression of the individuality which their tutors tell them is the only value. Some may also find rather unsatisfying the stock answer to any queries in this direction - that the artistic act consists in the selection of the image. The activity that follows the act (the laborious business of painting it up in enlarged form with number one brushes) may not seem to them much like art. The answer many have come up with has been to suppress areas, or re-arrange elements in a random sort of way, all in the hope of extending the artistic activity a little further, or in some way or other doctoring the mechanical image. But ultimately, no matter what they do to it, for the inexperienced the structure remains substantially the same - a mechanical pseudo-experience. If we accept the Kantian definition that structure is a concept imposed by the mind on its experience, that structure as we perceive it is the mind's subjective reduction to comprehensibility of its experiences of objective reality, and finally that without this subjectively imposed structure there is no comprehension, then we can see why the mechanical image fails to answer satisfactorily the student's search for phenomenological insight.

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[1] Susan Sonntag. On Photography. Allen Lane 1970, pp.23-24.

The view outlined above goes a long way to explaining why we still persist in valuing the painting more than the mechanical image, however beautiful or profound. (Inevitably, the beautiful or provocative photograph may more easily be made by accident, than the painting or sculpture to which we give the same response; our perception of it as beautiful or provocative may reside more in our conditioned response than in what we believe to be the artist's intent, and so we find if hard to accord it the same value, the same rarity.)

The same view also suggests an explanation for the de-humanised bleakness of photo-realist painting and the nagging unsatisfactoriness of body-cast sculpture. So that while the experienced or 'formed' painter or sculptor might have recourse to photographic sources and so widen or extend his experience by adding an unfamiliar dimension (the world seen through the single lens, presenting information encapsulated in a new way) this can add to, but never replace his 'subjective reduction to comprehensibility' in his phenomenological quest.

Perhaps the final word on 'photo-realist' painting and body-casting in sculpture is that such activities in the student's studio will contribute very little to his visual literacy, while there are a great many other activities that will contribute far more.

I think it is incumbent upon us as teachers to insist that all experience given visual form by the student be actual experience. We should encourage not only as wide a range of such experience as is compatible with weaving a 'fine net' within the limitations of the learning program, but also foster the intensity of that experience by every means at our disposal. This by no means excludes the illumination of experience for the student by leading him to appreciate the experiences of others - for this is part of the purpose of his history of art. The most cursory look at some aspect of a great painting might produce a leap in understanding which it would take a year of verbalising to bring about: to teach the student to see an orange is also to show him how Zurbaran saw it, how Chardin saw it, how Cezanne saw it. For this is part of what we mean by visual literacy. The much despised practice of copying from the masters has this as its primary target, quite apart from the immense amount of technical know-how it can promote, again so much more effectively than words alone. The fact that a painter of such unassailable distinction as Balthus should spend three months in the Louvre copying a Poussin, might give pause to those inclined to dismiss such copying as being of no value to the growing artist. Far from in any way inhibiting him, the absorption and processing of what Belthus encountered while copying Poussin gave him greater freedom, as is plain to see, and it made his work not less distinctive, but more.

What may be absorbed from the masters may be absorbed, needless to say, from the teacher. The teacher adds his experience, his vision, to the student's growing perception of reality, whether he likes it or not. For this is his function, over and above and at the same time inextricably interwoven with the expertise in techniques he will pass on to build the means for the student's quest. (The quest, in the fourth quarter of our century, and due to the visual illiteracy to which I have pointed, will for the initial period have to resemble more closely the apprenticeship than most of us would like to think, if the modern student is to be fully equipped). This is one of the reasons why teachers ought to be reticent about their private obsessions, to beware of restricting the student's vision to a miniature of their own: their impact is, by its very nature (duration and physical proximity) potentially the most powerful in the life of their students. Perhaps it is in part this that has led the modern instructor to abandon responsibility towards his charges, to say "We can't teach these kids anything ... it's best if they just stay home and do their own thing." Perhaps, though, this is but a pretext, a cover for the fact that the great majority of such instructors are showing themselves dislocated, unconvinced and ignorant.

The fact of the matter is, in the 1980's, that we are faced with an audience that evinces a clear longing for figurative art and a growing population of students who are eager to contract to provide it. The setting for this situation is that of a bankrupt avant-garde, so thoroughly bureaucratized that this alone dissuades the young from rushing to inherit, and in all quarters a massive and unforeseen loss of confidence in the modern movement; a universal passion for any artefact suggestive of permanence and love in its making, and an avid market for even the most superficial 'realism' that is a sure signal that values are shifting. And finally, an abundance of richly appointed art schools which do not appear to have any remote hope of coping with all this. Just how each school will cope will be a matter for the social historian. A matter for each teacher of art is that the dialogue should be established at a level compatible with the High Culture that we aspire to as that which makes life worth living. It cannot be very long before the voices of those students that demand it become too loud to ignore, and the gods must hear them.

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