WHAT MAKES A PAINTING GOOD?

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE CRITERIA USED IN EVALUATION

by

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Introduction

"To affirm that a work of art is good or bad is to commend or condemn, but not describe. .... Thus criticism does not, and cannot, have the impersonal character and strict rules applicable independently of time and place," ... (Macdonald 1966: 111) "Criticism and appraisal, too, are more like creation than like demonstration and proof." (Macdonald 1966: 112) This essay articulates evaluatory criteria that are used by both critics and laymen and which are cross-culturally applicable. Thus it seeks to articulate relatively objective types of criteria which we all use when evaluating paintings. This essay articulates fixed and objective criteria, but within these categories recognizes that there is much room for skillful, sympathetic and knowledgeable criticism. Thus criticism is a creative act. These objectively-articulated criteria are best seen as aids to, rather than carbon copies, for evaluation.

In order to discuss the relevant evaluatory criteria, this essay investigates the actual nature of art. This is necessary for two reasons: firstly, evaluatory criteria are grounded in a definition of art, and secondly, there have been many inadequate theories of art which do not take all the characteristics of art into consideration. For example, at the beginning of the century Clive Bell claimed that art was not an imitation of life, (which it is not), but consisted of

relationships between forms, lines and colours. Bell claimed that good art had nothing to do with representation. By the 1950's the critic Clement Greenberg stated that painting's proper concern was the delimitation of flatness, thus denying the illusionistic aspects of art. Both Bell and Greenberg evaluated paintings in terms of their definitions of art. For Bell all representational art was trivial, and for Greenberg paintings were good only if they asserted the two-dimensional flatness of the picture surface. Such definitions of art, with their associated criteria, are clearly inadequate theories with which to evaluate all art, some of which is representational and illusionistic but still good. This essay attempts to understand the essential nature of art and to articulate cross-cultural criteria embedded in this essential structure of all art.

The criteria for evaluation, it will be argued, are to be found in two categories: the aesthetic and the artistic. For a painting to be good it necessarily needs to be both aesthetically and artistically excellent.

An aesthetically excellent work is good when it has an internally coherent, well-developed and interesting structure. Aesthetic excellence is always concerned with the actual character of the work, with the relationships between forms, colours and lines, with emotions expressed in the art-work. Most human artifacts exhibit aesthetic characteristics. Being concerned with the actual character of the work, it has been the formalists, like Bell, who were mainly concerned with the aesthetic characteristics of works of art. These formalists tend to overlook the importance of the non-aesthetic characteristics of works of art, i.e. how works of art relate to 'life'. In this

century much formalist theory has been linked to the concept 'Art for Art's sake', and this concept denies the relevance of artistic criteria which refer beyond the actual work itself.

The artistic criteria are concerned with the effects, purposes and truthfulness to shared emotional, moral and cultural concerns. Another important artistic criterion is whether the interpretation of a significant subject is profound. Similarly we judge whether works of art are sincere expressions. All these judgements relate to aspects beyond the work itself, and link art to 'life', to the culture which informs it. The denial of these artistic criteria in favour of the formal and aesthetic criteria by many 20th century artists and critics can be seen as a larger cultural response. It can be seen as a withdrawal from the actual conditions of life into the realms of pure aesthetic contemplation, into abstract form or aesthetic novelty and shock.

This essay sets itself two tasks: firstly, to articulate a set of cross-cultural evaluatory criteria (aesthetic and artistic), which are grounded in a cross-cultural theory of art; and secondly,to argue that we in western culture evaluate paintings in terms of the philosophies and world views evident in the work itself, and from a theoretical position we ourselves hold. These two categories for evaluation apply to all western art, and are categories which we cannot argue about.

However, we do argue about which theories inform works of art, and which theories inform our evaluation of it. This is the crucial area of debate in evaluation. These theoretical positions are embedded

in the broader and objective concept; that evaluation is informed by some theoretical position.

So the second task this essay sets itself is to articulate a particular theoretical position. This position may be different from other theoretical positions. Furthermore, I evaluate paintings in the Modernist tradition in terms of this theoretical position which I hold to be valid.

CHAPTER ONE

Toward a general understanding of the structure of art

Evaluative criteria are grounded in a theory of art - of what art is. In this first chapter I hope to establish the status of a work of art as being an expressive symbol. Implied in this concept, that all works of art are symbolic expressions, is an understanding that art is, in a sense, a cross-cultural type of language which communicates by means of abstract expressive symbols or representational expressive symbols.

By thus establishing a general understanding of the structure of art, I argue that the core evaluative criteria are located within this cross-cultural concept of what art is. This definition of art extends to all art, and thus the evaluatory criteria are also cross-culturally applicable.

In this chapter I argue against certain theories of art which attempt to deny crucial aspects of the essential nature of art, and which consequently have inadequate evaluatory criteria embedded in them.

To begin, what have works as diverse as Mark Rothko's abstract colour fields and Rembrandt's self-portraits in common? They are all undoubtedly excellent works of art. Why? What properties do they share? Rembrandt's self-portraits are representations and Rothko's colour fields are abstractions. They thus employ different types of symbolic representation. However, in common with all works of art, good and bad, they communicate by means of symbols which vary in kind. The excellence of Rembrandt and Rothko's paintings is

determined, not by the fact that they are symbolic representations, but rather because they move us and are aesthetically pleasing. We might judge them good because they reveal truths about profound emotions, or important philosophical and cultural concerns. In both cases, some of Rembrandt's and some of Rothko's paintings can be seen as expressions of profound sorrow. Rembrandt asserts the dignity of the individual, which is a philosophical position we value, whilst we value Rothko's painting because of his unabashed celebration of emotion.

Rembrandt and Rothko lived almost three centuries apart, yet their paintings reveal processes which have much in common. Perhaps one can generalize on the basic structure of art, in spite of the stylistic differences between the works of Rembrandt and Rothko.

I argue that a work of art begins with an idea, intuition, emotion or suppressed subconcious desire. In order to communicate these mental states, the work of art needs to be located within a physical object. In the case of paintings, on a canvas; in song by the physical act of singing; on the pages of a book in a novel. These physical objects and acts are made in order to express the informing mental state. This expression is made by means of symbols. The symbols used in language are conventionally agreed upon, and have definite references. A work of art however, uses symbols which do not refer in the same way.

A work of art, like language, uses symbols in order to communicate mental states, but these symbolic references are freer, more emotionally associative than the rule-bound references of specific

languages. Works of art often create new meanings and communicate by means of obscure codes which are sometimes incomprehensible to those uninitiated to those codes. "... aesthetic codes can also break conventions as well as follow them: innovative art contains within itself clues or hints toward its own decoding. The artist who breaks with the conventions of his time hopes society will learn the new codes of his work and so will gradually 'appreciate' it." (Fiske 1982: 86)

Thus art is similar to language in that it has a formal signifier which refers to a concept - the signified. Neither art nor language is ever free of this symbolic relationship whereby the forms symbolize certain concepts. To assert that forms do not refer to concepts is to deny the very essence of art and language, which are by their very nature symbolic communications. Forms which refer to nothing are simply arbitrary objects. Similarly concepts without forms are just arbitrary thoughts, and communicate nothing. Some Minimalist artists claim that works of art refer to nothing. Such a claim is to deny their status as works of art; they are stripped of their symbolic function, and attempt to define themselves as arbitrary objects. What often asserts their symbolic function is the fact that they are displayed as normal art objects are, and we understand them as works of art because they then communicate symbolically, despite the artist's disavowal of reference.

Works of art, even if they do share this symbolic communicative function with language, are essentially different from ordinary language. The characteristics which define art as separate from language are its expressive and emotional characteristics. Susanne K.

Langer defines art as "... the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling." (Langer 1953: 40)

According to T.S. Eliot, "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that 'particular' emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." (Eliot 1975:48)

This does not mean that works of art are never intellectual. They can express thoughts and ideas, but always by means of emotional associations. Art is never purely intellectual like mathematics. What distinguishes dance from gymnastics, or music from mathematics, are their relatively expressive components. Mathematics is a code " with a stated and agreed relationship between signifiers and signifieds. They are symbolic , denotave, impersonal and static .... No one who has learned the code can have any disagreement about the meaning of '4 x 7 = 28". (Fiske 1982: 85) Music, on the other hand, has much less well defined codes. "Aesthetic codes .... are crucially affected by their cultural context; aberrant decodings are the norm. They are expressive, they encompass the interior subjective world." (Fiske 1982: 86)

Works of art may have intellectual or historical associations. For example, I would be unable to understand Courbet's The Artists Studio fully, without some additional non-visual information, explaining that the Jew symbolizes the bankers who associated with Louis Phillippe. This kind of intellectual association is specifically culture-bound,

and unless I have additional access to the culture, I would be unable to understand such associations, nor evaluate them.

However, the essential characteristic of a work of art, is not the intellectual associations which are specific to a particular culture, but rather that on a cross-cultural level it communicates expressively and emotionally. I do not need to be a member of a Papua New Guinean clan in order to appreciate a tribal mask. I surely will not have access to the specific cultural associations or functions of it, but I will be able to interpret the mask, because it expresses emotional states like fear or joy. The mask communicates by symbolically expressing emotional states, and all humans respond similarly to certain expressive kinds of symbols.

Similarly, a Papua New Guinean could understand a Minimalist sculpture as an abstract, meditative, uninvolved kind of symbolic expression, because smooth surfaces, hard edges, and repetitive shapes express these kinds of emotional states. What the Papua New Guinean would have no access to, would be the specific cultural references of the work, for example, the idea that Minimalist art rejects expression or reference to objects. Thus we once more can see that Minimalist art, which denies reference to emotion, can still be understood in terms of its expressive and emotional associations.

Thus all works of art are symbolic expressions. The paintings of Rembrandt and Rothko and Papua New Guinean masks all exhibit symbolic expressive characteristics. Rembrandt and Rothko are distinguished by the two types of expressive symbols they employed. There are two types of expressive symbols relevant to this essay; abstract and

representational.

Firstly, an artist may employ an abstract symbol, like colour, form or line. Blue is a colour with a reasonably well defined and cross-culturally agreed-upon set of meanings; i.e. it could symbolize coolth or tranquillity, whilst irregular lines may symbolize agitation or energy. Experiments in Synesthesia conducted by Osgood in the 1930's reveal that, cross-culturally, people attached very similar meanings to sounds, colours and shapes. Osgood holds that what accounts for this is "not direct similarities among the various qualities of reality but similarities in our affective responses to those qualities. There is something similar in our responses to white things, to straight things, to rising melodies, and to sweet things .... Osgood says this; .... by virtue of being members of the human species, people are equipped biologically to react to situations in certain similar ways - with autonomic, emotional reactions to rewarding and punishing situations (evaluation), with strong or weak muscular tension to things offering great or little resistance." (Wolterstorff 1980: 109) When we use dark or light colours, agitated or tranquil lines, rising or falling melodies, we use them as abstract types of expressive symbols. There is a multitude of abstract symbols which can be combined in countless different ways to express an enormous range of thoughts and emotions.

E.H. Gombrich, in his book Art and Illusion, asks the question, how can works of art be expressive? How can we say that Mozart's music expresses sadness? We could say that it is sad because it has slow, measured notes in a minor key. Thus what conveys the expression of

sadness are forms which have characteristics like those we associate with sadness i.e. slow, measured, minor sounds.

Mark Rothko's abstract paintings can thus be said to be profound expressions of tragedy and doom, because we associate dark maroon and black painterly boundarylessness with such emotions. Meaning, according to Gombrich, is generated by mixing and matching these abstract expressive symbols. For example, rectangles of black on dark maroon might express sorrow, but if they were painted in a hermetically-sealed way, a smooth, non-painterly way, such a painting would shut the spectator out, as opposed to Rothko's merging painterliness, which invites the spectator into an emotional space beyond the picture surface, thus having an entirely different meaning.

Secondly, meaning is not only generated by means of abstract symbols. Representational symbols also convey a wealth of meanings. Representation for Gombrich is never an objective imitation of reality, but rather a mental process by which the artist attempts to understand the world in terms of categories, or 'schema', as Gombrich calls them.

The artist who represents objects does so conceptually, in terms of a schema which helps him to categorize the myriad visual impressions he receives. In this process he is informed subjectively by his own temperament and more objectively by the style he works in.

Representations, like languages, convey specific meanings. For example, a nude refers symbolically to the concept of an unclothed figure. The meaning conveyed by the representation is not only limited to the obvious symbolic significance; meaning is also conveyed by how

the representation is made. The process of generating meaning is also affected by the mental concepts informing the representation.

For example, two people may set out to represent an object as three-dimensionally and realistically as possible, yet their interpretations will always be informed by subjective and stylistic guiding mental concepts, and these will always be different. The differences will reveal their emotional temperaments; for example, one might use fine, light lines expressive of tenderness, whilst another might use bold, heavy lines to represent objects and thus express a more violent temperament.

Similarly, representations are affected by different stylistic conventions. For example, Cezanne represents a still life in an entirely different way from Chardin. Both were concerned with representing objects, yet Cezanne represents these in terms of faceted planes, whilst Chardin represents them as straight- forward illusions of reality. Both styles represent objects in terms of different schema or organizing mental concepts. Thus representations are affected by both individual temperament and stylistic conventions.

In Rembrandt's last self-portrait, both his personal temperament and 17th century Dutch stylistic characteristics are evident in the work. Rembrandt has by means of sombre colours, loose paintwork, strong light contrasts, expressed a sense of a dignified yet sad individual. Rembrandt worked within a 17th century Dutch style which emphasized the materiality of objects. In the hands of lesser artists of this style, representations remained heavy and material. What we admire about Rembrandt is that within this style, he imbued representations

with individuality, spirituality and compassion.

We can thus assert that all works of art are expressive of mental states and emotions and convey meaning by means of abstract or representational expressive symbols.

Representation has been a controversial issue in the 20th century. Artists and critics sought to establish styles free of representation. It was in the face of this denial that Gombrich asserts the importance of representation. The denial of representation, which was championed by critics like Clive Bell and Roger Fry, has led to confused concepts about the nature of representation itself, which is the problem that Gombrich addressed. Relevant to this essay, this Formalist denial of representation and ' life' has led to the celebration of art for art's sake. This denial of life, of expression and of representation has culminated in what Peter Fuller calls the denial of the true aesthetic dimension in much 20th century art.

This drive to separate art from life began in the 19th century when representation was associated with illusionistically recreating actual life on a two-dimensional surface. Quite correctly artists felt that paintings were not imitations of life, but rather were something in themselves. However, they made the mistake of equating representation with imitation. Imitation is an uninterpreted copy, whilst representation is a symbolic expression.

Clive Bell, an influential formalist theoretician, was insistent that works of art were only good if they possessed 'significant form'. By this he meant significant relationships of colour, line and form. Bell

claimed, " to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. .... To appreciate a work of art we need bring nothing but a sense of form and colour and a knowledge of three dimensional space." (Bell 1966: 56) This was pure art. Representation had nothing to do with pure art. "Creating a work of art is so tremendous a business that it leaves no leisure for catching a likeness .... Every sacrifice made to representation is something stolen from art." (Bell 1966: 55)

Bell wrongly discredits life and representation. He fails to see them as entirely separate issues. Representations are not copies. According to Gombrich they have as much structure as non-representational works have. Representations are also related to each other by means of significant relationships. They are as subject to aesthetic formal evaluation as abstract works are. Bell's greatest contribution is his emphasis on the conceptual and abstract nature of these aesthetic criteria. Gombrich also argued that representations are conceptual and structured by means of organizing principles or schema. Thus they relate to art and life.

Secondly, Bell was informed by the Modernist drive to separate art from life. Because of this, Bell wrongly assumes that because art has a structure of its own, it therefore has no connection to life. Art for Bell is somehow pure, exalted and austere, whilst life is contaminated, for example, by feelings of love, hate or terror. It is exactly these associations, these feeling of life, which give art such meaning, and which Bell arrogantly dismisses.

The denial of these innately expressive qualities of art, which connect art to life, was reasserted by the Minimalists and Conceptualists. The Minimalists were only interested in the formal 'objectness'of a work of art. Clement Greenberg claimed that paintings were not illusions nor representations of emotional states. Paintings were themselves, they asserted their two-dimensional, flat, objectness, free of expressive associations. Thus the Minimalists were the penultimate development of Modernism in its drive to divorce itself from the Renaissance illusionistic tradition. Conceptualism was the final episode, denying the object itself in favour of the idea.

Representation is not a crucial element to a work of art. There are many wonderful works of art that are entirely non-representational, e.g. a Bach fugue or a Rothko painting. It is useful to understand representation as a class of expressive symbols. It is interesting that the majority of visual symbols are representational. This can perhaps be accounted for by the dominance of what we see and our instinctual drive to symbolize what we have seen.

However, it is necessary that we understand the real status of a work of art. It is not a copy or imitation of life, although it might be a representation which stands for something in life. It has a structure of its own which is not dependent on being true to actuality. We should understand art as having its own structure, like language. But having its own structure does not preclude it from deriving from and contributing to life. Art is embedded in life, but not dependent on it.

In conclusion this chapter attempts three things. Firstly, it attempts to establish a framework in which to locate and understand the structure of all art. All art is symbolic communication. Being that, it has certain properties. Symbols have meaning; they are conventional agreements; they refer to something that they are not. What distinguishes artistic symbols from other types of communicating symbols is their relatively free and expressive character. This essay emphasises two types of expressive symbols; abstract and representational symbols.

Secondly, this essay attempts a definition of art that applies to all art. Rembrandt and Rothko's paintings, children's drawings, and Papua New Guinean tribal masks all share these properties. We might not understand the specific meanings and functions of tribal masks, because we do not have direct access to their informing religious or cultural preoccupations. We will however understand these masks in terms of our emotional reactions to visual and aural stimuli (Osgood's findings). All works of art are symbolically expressive, abstractly or representationally, and accessible to humans because we share similar emotional responses to stimuli. We will have greater access to the works in our own tradition, but even these reveal themselves to us in terms of their expressive associations.

Thirdly, this essay has argued against the denial of representation associated with a denial of 'life'. This denial of representation and life culminated in the concept of art for art's sake, which denies crucial aspects of art and culminates in the denial of artistic evaluative criteria.

This essay attempts to articulate a definition of art which does not deny abstraction nor representation. If we see art as a symbolic expression we assert the structural independence of art from imitating reality, whilst at the same time connecting art intimately to life.

Such an understanding of art implies that when evaluating it we do so in terms of aesthetic criteria, which refer to the formal and expressive character of the work itself. Secondly, and as importantly, we evaluate it in terms of artistic criteria, which refer beyond the formal structure to the functions, the effects , the purposes of works of art. Artistic criteria are concerned with truthfulness to shared emotional, moral and cultural concerns, with profundity of interpretation or sincerity of expression. These artistic criteria are far more culturally affected than the aesthetic criteria are. It is beyond the scope of this essay to argue for the cross-cultural application of these artistic criteria. All this essay can claim is that works of art are cultural artifacts and will necessarily be evaluated as such.

CHAPTER TWO

Aesthetic excellence

The standard aesthetic criteria for the evaluation of art are those which create aesthetic satisfaction. In order to achieve aesthetic satisfaction one must contemplate disinterestedly. There is no purpose to this contemplation other than the delight engendered by contemplating the formal structure for itself. Aesthetic contemplation is more concerned with the structural and formal aspects of art. Aesthetic contemplation is closer to Bell's 'pure art', and is less concerned with functions, effects, purposes or true references to moral and cultural concerns.

The aesthetic dimension is not only limited to art. We contemplate essays, butterfly wings, plates of food, pornographic movies, etc., in the aesthetic mode. It is therefore not possible to use these aesthetic criteria as the only criteria for the evaluation of art. A butterfly wing is not a work of art just because it shares the aesthetic dimension with works of art. If the aesthetic is primarily concerned with satisfying internal relationships or references, then the extra-aesthetic or artistic criteria are concerned with references to external relationships, like emotional expression, referring to actual life experiences by means of symbolic interpretations of significant subjects. If it is true that all works of art are symbolic expressions, then we judge how internally coherent they are, as well as what meaning they convey, and whether the meaning is profound, relevant or truthful. When evaluating a work of art we employ both

aesthetic and artistic criteria.

The standard aesthetic criteria have been adequately articulated by Nicholas Wolterstorff. In the following section I use his arguments. The strongest of all the aesthetic criteria is unity. Primarily we judge a work to see whether it exhibits a unity of form. We judge a painting to see whether the forms and colours relate to one another in a unified way. We judge whether the forms relate to the format, whether all the parts relate to the whole. It should be compositionally coherent. ".... often what critics say about a work , as a reason for their assessment of it as aesthetically excellent, are such things as that it is well-organized, that it is formally perfect,and that it has an inner logic of structure and style (these examples are borrowed from Beardsley)."(Wolterstorff 1980: 164)

For example, Mondrian's composition in red, yellow and blue is an example of unity achieved relatively simply. The rectangular forms relate to the format and to each other, the primary colours relate in a unified way to each other as well as to the black, white and grey. It is an extreme example of being "formally perfect and exhibiting an inner logic of structure and style." All great paintings do so, but achieve unity by employing varying unifying strategies.

Not everyone agrees on the strategies used for achieving unity, hence much dispute. For example ...." The Renaissance architects uniformly preferred symmetrically composed buildings, whereas most in the contemporary world strongly prefer asymmetrically composed ones. So when confronted with a building whose unity is secured by symmetry, a contemporary person may well not find its being unified by the

strategy of symmetry to be, for him, a merit in the thing. He may in fact find it to be the one aspect of the building that he thoroughly dislikes. But though he will not find its being unified by the strategy of symmetry to be a merit in the building, yet I think he will find its being unified to be such. Towards that he is neither indifferent nor hostile." (Wolterstorff 1980: 164 -165)

However, unity is not the only criterion for aesthetic excellence. A blank canvas exhibits enormous unity, but we are not aesthetically satisfied by it. Like an essay, a work of art also needs some complexity. It should develop its themes, and have a "variety of significantly differentiated parts".(Wolterstorff 1980:165) An aesthetically good work of art should have an internal richness, variety and complexity. As with unity , complexity is secured by different strategies. Taste might determine the acceptance of a particular strategy. For example, a very simple line drawing by Matisse sets up relatively simple, but enormously pleasing, complexities. This type of complexity might appeal to some more than Gericault's Raft of the Medusa, which has greater complexities. Excessive complexity is by no means a guarantee of aesthetic excellence either. To modern taste, "The Triumph of the Name of Jesus" by Giovanni Gaulli is excessively complex, and therefore unappealing. However, Modern and Baroque sensibilities alike would agree that some form of complexity is crucial to its aesthetic excellence.

Some complexities are secured by form (the Cubists), or colour (the Fauvists and Expressionists) or by lines or masses or contrasts (Chiaroscuro). "Critics standardly offer aesthetic praise to objects

by saying of them that they are developed on a large scale, or that they are rich in contrasts, or that they are subtle and imaginative (these examples are borrowed from Beardsley)." (Wolterstorff 1980: 165)

A painting (or a movie or an essay) may be unified and complex but dull and boring. Its blandness is an aesthetic defect for all. In order not to be bland or dull, it needs a certain quality of intensity. Paintings are often praised for their tenderness, or lyricism, or boldness, or sensuousness, etc. These are qualities of intensity. Unity and complexity are largely concerned with internal references in a painting, whereas intensity is more emotive, and refers beyond the internal structure to mental and emotional human preoccupations. Because of our common biological and psychological makeup we share reactions to certain qualities of intensity. Some value monumentality (the Egyptians), some fleshy sensuousness (Rubens) or mysterious lyricism (Klee).

Perhaps even more subject to the vagaries of taste than either unity or complexity, qualities of intensity spark greater controversies due to their highly emotive nature. However, no matter what one's preference for qualities of intensity is, having a quality of intensity - even if I dislike it - is an aesthetic merit. We can agree on the category of intensity, even if we cannot agree on the type of intensity.

Clive Bell claimed that 'significant form' was the only quality that was required for a painting to be good. In essence he was making the claim that a painting be a self-contained, non-imitative structure

which satisfied these aesthetic criteria of Unity, Complexity and Intensity. It is the case that paintings have to satisfy these aesthetic criteria in as much as essays do, in order to be judged good. But the aesthetic criteria are not the only criteria for evaluating a painting, although they are crucial. Paintings and essays not exhibiting these aesthetic criteria will be judged bad. Anti- art consciously stripped itself of the aesthetic dimension, and in spite of its strong comment on its society, it cannot be judged good.

If Anti-art errs by stressing meaning and content, then the formalists erred by emphasising only some of the aesthetic criteria. Unity and Complexity are concerned with the formal arrangements, and only qualities of Intensity refer to human preoccupations and 'life'. Before discussing the other criteria (Artistic) which should be (and are) used for evaluating paintings, here are some aspects which have no bearing on the aesthetic character of a work. These arguments are borrowed from Wolterstorff.

For a painting to be aesthetically satisfying it does not have to be true to actuality. It is not an aesthetic feature of the Mona Lisa that the model who sat for it actually looked like the representation. A painting has a 'life' of its own, and its aesthetic merit does not lie in how close to representing visual reality it comes. Rather, the aesthetic merit of a painting lies in the relationships it sets up, and not in the relationships borrowed from 'life'. Works of art are fictively truthful to something beyond their own structure, i.e. truthful to cultural preoccupations. Being true to actuality is not therefore an aesthetic feature of a painting. That works of art

truthfully refer to philosophies, emotions or moral concerns , I will later argue, are artistic merits of works of art.

Secondly, the effects of a work of art are not relevant to aesthetic evaluation, although they are relevant to artistic evaluation. By effects we mean how a painting affects us, what it means to us, how it alters our perceptions, how it achieves its intentions. When we aesthetically contemplate something, we contemplate it for itself, for how it reveals its structure. It is an activity of internal reference. The effects of a work of art go beyond this internal reference. This activity of referring beyond itself is an artistic concern. Before I enlarge on this in the next chapter, there are two more aspects of paintings which are aesthetically irrelevant.

Craftsmanship or artistic skill are not aesthetic merits. No matter how well Rubenstein plays an aesthetically bad piece of music, it will not be substantially improved by his excellent performance. No matter how carefully a painter crafts his paintings, if they are aesthetically weak or are badly structured , no amount of careful crafting can improve them.

It is aesthetically irrelevant "that the work conforms to the artists intent or that it does not; that it was made painstakingly or was made hastily; that it was made skillfully or was made carelessly; that what was said by way of the work was sincerely said or was insincerely said; that the work is original or that it was derivative. Some highly original works are only bizarre; others magnificent. Some carefully composed works are laboured and wooden; others splendid. The laboriously worked-over drawing of the student is best awarded a

grade and then in mercy destroyed. The dashed-off sketch of Rembrandt is priceless." (Wolterstorff 1980: 160)

Craftsmanship, however, is not artistically irrelevant. Even an aesthetically strong work, if badly or inappropriately crafted , will be artistically diminished. My playing a Beethoven sonata will artistically diminish the performance. Even if I composed an aesthetically good painting but failed to achieve a satisfactory finished product, through poor or inappropriate craftsmanship, then it would not be judged to be good.

Craftsmanship refers to the artist, not the art work. We evaluate the artist's skill at being able to master formal aspects of the work. We might praise the artist because of his skill at representing objects, which he does in terms of a coherent, yet differentiated schema. Therefore, when judging craftsmanship, we judge the artist not the art work. What we judge are the artist's aesthetic skills, his ability to communicate formally and aesthetically by means of a unified, yet complex schema.

Beauty has often been considered a criterion for the excellence of a work of art. Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' is beautiful, but Munch's 'The Cry' is not. Both are considered to be good paintings. Botticelli's is not aesthetically better than Munch's because it is beautiful. Its beauty is, I suspect, a quality of intensity. That it has a quality of intensity, like beauty, is of aesthetic significance, but the particular type of intensity cannot be prescribed. Beauty itself is not a criterion for aesthetic excellence. Some people might equate beauty with aesthetic excellence, and thus argue that beauty is

a necessary criterion for a work to be judged good. However I do not equate beauty with aesthetic excellence. Aesthetic excellence is concerned with unity, complexity and expressive intensity. Beauty is a kind of expressive intensity.

Lastly, liking a work does not mean that it has aesthetic merit, and cannot be a ground for aesthetic evaluation. We might like works for qualities that are not concerned with the aesthetic. For example, I might like a painting because it reminds me of a pleasant occasion - for sentimental reasons. Or I might like it because it is valuable. I might like it because the experts say it is good. I might like it for subjective reasons. When we aesthetically evaluate a painting we can only evaluate in terms of objective or commonly held criteria and these are located in the work itself and not what we subjectively import to the work.

Although I might not like a work, my dislike of it would not prevent me from evaluating it as good. My evaluation of it would primarily be in terms of the aesthetic criteria it exhibits, and, secondly, as importantly, which artistic criteria it exhibits.

CHAPTER THREE

Artistic excellence

The aesthetic excellence of a work of art depends on criteria like unity, complexity and intensity. There are many strategies employed for obtaining these aesthetic results, and we might argue about these strategies, but we cannot argue about the core aesthetic criteria which inform these strategies.

Similarly, when we evaluate paintings in terms of their artistic criteria, we do so in terms of a few general core criteria, although within these criteria we might argue from different points of view.

When we evaluate aesthetically we do so in terms of a skillful blending and weighing of the criteria. For example, a work may have unity and complexity but be boring, so that in contrast to a work that was perhaps less unified or complex but more emotionally intense we would evaluate the latter work better. Evaluation is a matter of skillful matching and weighing of criteria.

To some extent the same applies to the artistic criteria. For example, profundity might be considered more important than truthfulness, i.e. a work might be a sincere expression or a truthful reference to some aspect of reality, but we might evaluate it to be less good than a work which was both sincere and truthful, but which interpreted a significant subject with a certain degree of profundity. Thus, like aesthetic criteria, we do not employ artistic criteria in isolation. Artistic evaluation involves a similar skill at matching and weighing

of categories.

Artistic criteria, unlike aesthetic criteria, are concerned with aspects of a work of art which relate it to life, to moral and emotional positions, to human emotions and needs and to the various functions that works of art are required to fulfill in specific cultural contexts, and more generally as well.

To simplify matters these artistic criteria can be labelled as:

1. Profundity of interpretation.
2 Truthfulness to major aspects of reality or to moral and cultural concerns.
3 Sincerity of expressed emotions.
4 Various purposes and effects of works of art.

There might be great debates about which interpretation or which subject is profound. We might argue that one theoretical position underpinning a work of art is inferior to another. We might argue about the sincerity of expression or about which purposes are valid. But we cannot dismiss the fact that our arguments in western culture are all informed by these various artistic criteria.

Having established these criteria which I claim to be pertinent to all western artistic evaluation, I furthermore argue for a particular set of theoretical positions, which might of course be at odds with some other theoretical position. I hope to argue persuasively for the validity of the theories I hold to be relevant. Thus we evaluate paintings in terms of the theoretical positions evident in the works themselves, and we evaluate them from theoretical positions we hold

ourselves. In this chapter I deal with the former proposition and with the latter in chapter four.

The first and perhaps most important artistic criterion is the degree to which a significant subject has been profoundly interpreted.

According to T.M. Greene a work of art will have artistic greatness if it is seen "to mediate a profound experience, via artistic form, some profound interpretation of its subject matter." (Greene 1966: 75) According to Greene there are two criteria which determine artistic greatness, and these are "depth", or imaginative interpretation, and "breadth", i.e. reference to a comprehensive philosophy.

"Depth" is concerned with the penetrative intensity and imaginative insight of the artist. For example Matisse interprets a still life with imaginative intensity and insight; whereas Tretchikoff might also interpret a still life - but with less imaginative insight, because he lacks sincerity or spiritual depth. This "depth" criterion relates to creativity, imagination and sincerity of expression, which I will expand upon later.

But imaginative insight is not the only criterion for artistic profundity. Matisse interprets a significant subject which allows him to convey a larger more comprehensive philosophy of life - for Matisse flowers, fruit, and women were symbols of some ultimate blessing. By contrast, Felician Rops deals with a pornographic subject in a penetrating and insightful way, and we might judge his works good because they meet the criterion of "depth."

But Rops paintings will not be judged great because his moral perversity also becomes a matter of judgement. Rops' subjects will not significantly reveal an important and culturally sanctioned philosophy of life.

According to Greene, a work of art can only be truly great if its subject matter gives the artist an opportunity to express his more comprehensive philosophy of life and if his interpretation of it is universally humanly relevant.

Thus the second criterion for Greene is that a work has "breadth" - comprehensive philosophy. Thus genuinely profound art depends on penetrating and imaginative insight; important subject matter and a deep and wide outlook on the part of the artist, i.e. the artist, in order to produce profound works, needs a profound and deep philosophy of life.

Now it might appear that Greene is addressing traditional concepts of interpretation, subject and informing philosophies, and that these old fashioned concepts are irrelevant to 20th century art. But let us look at some Dada works which set themselves against traditional aesthetic and artistic concepts to see whether these criteria still apply.

In terms of these criteria I compare Picabia's Amorous Procession with Duchamp's The Bride Stripped Bare By Her Bachelors, Even. Duchamp's work is undoubtedly a better work of art. Both have interpreted their subjects with an imaginative and penetrating insight. Both subjects metaphorically associate machines with humans with sexual acts. Yet Picabia simply presents his amorous procession as an affront to

bourgeois concepts of sexuality. He condemns and satirizes ordinary sexuality by associating it with a machine.

Duchamp, although he also presents the Bride as a system of plumbing, reveals a much larger and more comprehensive philosophy. The Bride is traditionally a symbol of purity, and by representing her as a system of plumbing Duchamp makes her doubly inaccessible. As a bride she is a symbol of inaccessible purity, and as a representation of a bride in terms of plumbing, Duchamp questions the whole premise of art. Because if she is a representation, she can never be a bride.

Art can thus never be a substitute for nature. Art, for Duchamp, is separate from nature. This work amounts to a philosophical treatise on the nature of art. It is thus much more profound, interesting and complex than Picabia's work, although they deal with similar subjects. Duchamp's work is informed by some major aspect of reality, whereas Picabia's work is informed by a less profound, although perhaps truthful, aspect of reality.

Greene, to recapitulate, states that if a work of art is to be truly great, its subject matter must give the artist an opportunity to express a more comprehensive philosophy of life, and his interpretation of that philosophy must be universally humanly relevant. Duchamp in this case is more profound than Picabia is, and we jugdge his work to be better. Thus what we judge are underlying philosophies themselves, and the degree to which they have been interpreted.

There may be many profound insights into major aspects of reality, and

Greene argues that we cannot judge any one major moral, theoretical or philosophical position to be absolutely great. Although we do of course distinguish between some moral, theoretical and philosophical positions which are not as universally relevant as others are, i.e. we distinguish between aspects of Picabia's and Duchamp's works. We do distinguish between works which exhibit corrupting or destructive underlying philosophies from philosophies which serve greater interests of humanity, e.g. liberation. Thus we distinguish between morally good or bad informing theoretical positions. But within the major aspects of reality or morally acceptable informing theoretical positions, and there are many, we cannot insist on one absolute informing moral position. Thus, to use Greene's example the Avignon "Pieta expresses a belief which sincere Christians have cherished and continue to cherish with varying degrees of comprehension." .... Cezanne's "landscape expresses man's abiding sense of the impersonality of nature - a sense which profoundly influenced human thought and behaviour. Both paintings therefore express what many thoughtful men and women have regarded and will continue to regard as true insights into some major aspects of reality, and as valid evaluations from some relatively inclusive point of view. If either interpretation is accepted as all-inclusive, absolute and final, the other must be condemned as false: if either painting is judged to be absolutely great, all other paintings must be judged to be trivial or perverse. But if we exorcise this "demon of the absolute" and approach both paintings with human understanding and catholicity of outlook, we shall be able to admit that each in its own way is genuinely great according to finite standards." (Greene 1966:84)

We judge both the Cezanne and Pieta paintings great, because both are informed by relatively profound moral or philosophical or theoretical positions. No one major aspect of reality or one moral position is ultimately great, but what we do distinguish between are profound or trivial or bad theoretical positions. This is an important distinction. We discriminate for all sorts of reasons between great, good, mediocre, trivial or downright bad moral, theoretical or philosophical positions. We have many different reasons for doing so - and argue fiercely about which we believe to be correct.

Critics constantly argue about which theoretical position is most valid. Peter Fuller claims that "..if art... refuses its moral or theoretical aspect, if it, in effect, renounces the practice of reconciliation it becomes stripped of the aesthetic dimension, and reduces itself to the application, through merely manual gestures, of substances to bits, and pieces of broken symbolic orders. Not even in illusion can it create an other reality which challenges the existing one... Marcuse argued that when art abandons its transcendant autonomy it succumbs to that reality which it seeks to grasp and indict." (Fuller 1985:13)

Fuller articulates a theory of art according to which works of art should function in the world to mediate inner experience with outer reality. And works which do so are imaginative expressions of internal realities. Such works are informed by the true aesthetic dimension, and Fuller argues for the theoretical validity of what he calls the "true aesthetic dimension." By contrast, according to Fuller, works which renounce this aesthetic dimension by denying the imaginative and expressive aspects of art, and simply appropriate the

"real", are informed by a bad or false moral and theoretical position. Hence in terms of Fullers' theory we will judge such works inferior to those in which the "aesthetic dimension" is evident.

By contrast, Clement Greenberg offers a theory of art which seeks to validate the reality of the two-dimensional surface that Fuller sees as being at such odds with the aesthetic dimension. Greenberg and his followers, would, no doubt, have what they considered good reasons for adopting such a theory.

Both Fuller and Greenberg offer theories of art which seek to explain aspects of reality. Some might judge Fuller's theory to be a profound and comprehensive theory, whilst others might judge Greenberg's theory to be an articulation of some other aspect of reality. Both address reality, but are informed by different theories.

How are we to decide between them? Are we to say that because they both address problems relevant to the twentieth century we cannot distinguish between them? No we do not - we judge theories in terms of how coherent, comprehensive and true they appear to us. It is for reasons like these that I judge Fuller's theory to be more profound than Greenberg's - Fuller offers a broader, less diminished view of art and human existence. Good evaluation presupposes some good coherent, accessible theory.

A broad concept of art entails the idea that there are not only a few narrow moral, theoretical or philosophical positions in terms of which we evaluate art. There are many philosophies which inform art and all a critic can demand of an artist is that he deal with some significant

subject and exhibit a genuine depth of understanding and interpretive insight, and a genuine breadth of outlook which is informed by some major aspect of reality or some major theoretical and philosophical insights.

To recapitulate what this chapter has tried to establish so far: Although we might argue about which theoretical position is better or more comprehensive - and critics argue fiercely about this issue - we can objectively say that all critics evaluate works of art in terms of their (a) penetrative insight and (b) reference to some major aspect of reality which is informed by all sorts of differing moral, theoretical and philosophical positions. These positions also become matters of evaluation. For the sake of simplicity I label these two criteria "profundity of interpretation."

The second criterion relevant to this essay is the matter of artistic truth. All artistic truth is essentially fictive truth. A work of art is always a metaphorical or fictive allusion to some aspect of reality. I make the distinction in order to emphasize that the concept of fictive truth is implied in an understanding that works of art are symbolic expressions. Being symbolic or fictive they are essentially not what they stand for. Opposed to this concept of fictive truth is the idea that works of art are truthful only to themselves, i.e. they are real in themselves, they truthfully state their own being. These works deny their symbolic or fictive reference, and can no longer be identified as proper works of art . Thus truth, in the sense that I understand it, is always a fictive reference to all sorts of aspects of reality.

In the 20th century, artistic truth has been employed as a prime criterion. If a work was truthful, it was good. But truthful to what? Some works are truthful to immoral or destructive informing philosophies, for example , they might be Facist works. Are we to say that Facist artworks are good simply because they truthfully reveal a Facist ideology? If truthfulness were the criterion for evaluating the goodness of a work of art, then we would be obliged to support such a view. In the previous section, I have argued that we judge works of art in terms of what they refer to, not only how truthfully they refer. Thus truthfulness is a criterion that cannot be employed in isolation.

However we cannot dismiss the criterion of truth. An interpretation of reality which is believed to be false cannot be accepted as profound. Works which are pure propaganda, or which manipulate emotions, are not concerned with truthfully revealing some aspect of reality; they aim to persuade and manipulate us even if they resort to lies. Thus we do not evaluate a propaganda poster nor a kitsch painting of horses galloping off into the sunset as profound or truthful.

We might see some Conceptual works as true references to an alienated condition. Often I suspect such works are praised simply because they truthfully refer to some major aspect of reality, i.e. alienation. If the only criterion for evaluation were truth, then we would evaluate these works as good.

However, I cannot evaluate Vito Acconi's Seedbed as a profound work of art. It might truthfully refer to an alienated condition. The artist communicates his loneliness and alienation by means of masturbating to

fantasies he associates with the footsteps of the people on the stage above him, and then relays his responses through a loudspeaker. This 'art work' can therefore be seen as a truthful reference to alienation. What the work lacks is some reference to a life-informing philosophy, some commonly sanctioned normative base.

Critics like Peter Fuller and philosophers like Greene and Marcuse, although they have different formulations for a normative base, seem to locate it in common human concerns. Fuller refers to it as " an imaginative perception of natural form ...." It is a practice " of reconciliation in illusion, between the self and the social and physical worlds ...." It is "a redemption through form." (Fuller 1985: 16)

For Marcuse, art is "the fictioneers projection of a world alternative to the actual world, a world which is a stylized transformation of the actual world while yet a "recollection" of it (p. 73), functions as an indictment of the actual world and invocation of a liberating alternative to the actual world, whilst at the same time serving strangely to reconcile us to the actual world." (Wolterstorff 1980: 152)

For T.M. Greene "A work of art will be judged to possess greatness or profundity as it seems to the observer (his philosophy of life being what it is) to mediate a profound experience by expressing via artistic form, some profound interpretation of its subject matter. (Greene 1966:75)

Acconi's Seedbed offers no redemption, no reconciliation with the

actual world. It lacks a profound interpretation of its subject matter. Thus in terms of these three theories which some hold to be valid, the work lacks some broadly accepted normative base. I hold that works lacking such normative sanction cannot be evaluated as good, despite the fact that they are truthful references to some aspect of reality.

Thus truthfulness to some aspect of reality is used as a criterion for evaluation, but I argue that it is a criterion that is necessarily dependent on the first set of criteria, i.e. it is dependent on some acceptable normative base. "Artistic truth would thus seem to be a necessary though not sufficient condition of artistic greatness." (Greene 1966: 82)

I have been discussing how the truthfulness of a work of art to some aspect of reality is a matter of judgement for all critics. Some critics, unlike Greene, might argue that truthfulness on its own is a sufficient criterion and need not be dependent on some informing normative base. All critics, however, will agree that truthfulness to aspects of reality is a criterion that we employ when evaluating works of art.

The sincerity with which the artist expresses himself also becomes a matter of evaluation. Sincerity of expression is related to, but different from truthfulness to aspects of reality, in that sincerity refers to the artist's sincerity evident in the work, whereas truthfulness to aspects of reality refers to some larger informing philosophy.

Sincerity of expression, some might argue, does not have the breadth

of application that truth and profundity have. For some Critics, art is beyond individual emotion and expression. However I argued in the first chapter that all art is essentially expressive, and communicates emotional states by means of abstract and representational symbols. These symbols are cross-culturally accessible, because as humans we understand works of art in terms of their emotional and expressive qualities rather that their conceptual ones. Thus, if works of art are essentially expressive, what we evaluate is the sincerity with which these expressions are made.

Leo Tolstoy claims that the value of a work of art depends on the sincerity with which it is made. If an artist feels an emotion or an idea strongly, and there is no limit to the kinds of emotions he might feel, as long as he expresses himself clearly, then he will produce a good work of art.

Sincerity of expression prevents the artist from being false or manipulative, or making a work with a specific end in mind. Art of the upper classes, for Tolstoy, had this means/ends dynamic, whereby artists made art works for amusement or remuneration. Such art for Tolstoy was false art. According to Tolstoy, true art cannot be produced at will, as a means to some preconceived end. True art must generate from the artist's inner spirit. Furthermore, sincerely expressed art is universal and accessible to everyone. Thus true art, for Tolstoy, is not obscure or difficult. True art is connected to life, not separate from it. Thus according to Tolstoy, all art that is sincerely expressed is good art, be it a major painting or a hymn or a folksong. All art that is insincere, manipulative, aiming at

preconceived or remunerative ends, or simply for amusement, is bad art.

There may be many objections to Tolstoy's theory. For example, do we condone all sorts of expressed emotions? What is the relationship between the artist's emotions and the emotions evident in the art work itself? These are issues I will leave undiscussed. However, I argue that we use the criterion of sincerity of expression when we evaluate works of art. For example, we evaluate a painting by Tretchikoff to be worse than a painting by Rembrandt. The latter sincerely expresses himself, whilst Tretchikoff seeks to manipulate some sentimental reaction from us. Tretchikoff is thus not sincerely expressing himself from his inner spirit.

Sincerity of expression relates to Fuller's concept of the true aesthetic dimension. According to Fuller, the aesthetic dimension is part of our biological and psychological make-up as human beings. As humans we are different to animals; we can manipulate the world because of our increased brain size and our manual dexterity. We also have the unusual capacity to be creative and imaginative. This creativity and imaginativity, according to Fuller and D.W. Winnicott, a psychologist whose theory he argues for, arises as a result of our inability to relate to reality immediately. We have constantly to relate the outer and inner realities, and we do so creatively and imaginatively. All humans are constantly relating these inner and outer realities. The reason we do so, according to Winnicott, is that as infants we are so dependent that we have to develop these creative and imaginative powers in order to cope with our very real vulnerability. This creative and imaginative area becomes the

bridge between inner subjective experience and outer reality. No human, according to Winnicott is ever free of the strain of relating these inner and outer realities. Art then is located in this creative and imaginative space and becomes a buffer between inner subjectivity and outer reality.

Therefore when an artist sincerely expresses himself, he is engaged in a true creative and imaginative act. The purpose of expressing himself sincerely is to relate inner and outer realities and thus mediate life's experiences for himself and the spectator. If he denies the true aesthetic dimension by being manipulative or insincere, he can no longer mediate important human emotions and concerns. His work will lack the true aesthetic dimension and we will not judge it to be a good work of art.

Thus we could say that another important criterion for evaluating works of art is the sincerity with which they are expressed. Theories which attempt to argue for art stripped of the expressive dimension, I have already, argued are inadequate theories of art.

Lastly, this essay looks at the purposes and effects of works of art as possible criteria for evaluation.

Works of art are made for many diverse reasons. Some works are made to confirm a world view, which others challenge. Some are made to console us, and some are made as retreats from reality. We evaluate them in terms of the specific functions they culturally appropriate.

What we cannot do, however, is to assume that all works of art have a single function and then proceed to evaluate them in terms of that

single purpose.

The effects of a work of art, it has already been argued, have no bearing on the aesthetic value of the work. Being self-contained, how a work of art affects anything is irrelevant to its aesthetic value. But the effects of a work of art do have bearing on the artistic value. Works of art are not neutral objects, they were created intentionally to effect something, to mediate an experience, to act in the world. As instruments of communication they were made to convey ideas, feelings, and intuitions.

We can argue about which effects are good or bad, but I claim that we cannot dispute that works of art have many diverse purposes and effects. Roger Fry argues that a painter paints well when " he is completely detached from the 'meanings and implications of things,' the whole field of vision becomes for him just the coherence among tones and colours, which transcends the boundaries of objects themselves." (Falkenheim 1980:91) Such a definition of art denies that it has anything to communicate beyond itself, and can therefore have no functions or purposes in the world, nor any effects.

If, however, one holds the view that works of art are expressive symbols, that they communicate diverse meanings of both the artist and the society which informs his beliefs, then it could be argued that the effects of a work of art do have bearing on its value.

Some might argue, that if the effects of a work of art are to liberate, mediate an experience, challenge an accepted world view, or confirm another, then these effects might be seen as "life-enhancing"

and therefore normatively "good." On the other hand, if the effects of a painting were to obscure, devalue or confirm prejudices, then these would be judged normatively "bad." Thus, although works of art have diverse functions and effects, ultimately evaluations of effects become matters of normative evaluation - which we have already discussed.

Thus, this last evaluative criterion claims that we do evaluate works of art in terms of their diverse purposes and effects. The effects have bearing on the normative positions already discussed, and the purposes are informed by the various functions art works play in societies - which I shall shortly discuss.

What we consider when evaluating the purposes of an art work is that it serves a particular purpose well - that it is made to console us or challenge us or liberate us. What we cannot claim is that all art should serve one purpose. In the twentieth century it has been a popular belief that all art should challenge the existing order and this criterion has been upheld by some as the single function of art. (Given that some critics deny that art functions at all; because critics like Bell and Fry would claim that art is above functioning in the world.)

To assert that art has a single function is to assume a narrow and dogmatic position. Some art challenges existing conditions, and thus serves the society, or parts of a society, whilst other art consoles us, or offers us an escape from reality and serves the individuals in a society in another way. All we can claim is that art serves many purposes, and that we evaluate it in terms of these diverse purposes.

Nicholas Wolterstorff claims that the most pervasive benefit ...." is the confirmatory function of art. Over and over when surveying representational art we are confronted with the obvious fact that the artist is not merely projecting a world which has caught his private fancy, but a world true in significant respects to what his community believes to be real and important. .... To understand the art of ancient and medieval South and Central America, the art of India and the art of Medieval Europe, one must set off to the side our contemporary image of the alienated artist who has a prophetic insight to deliver a stinging condemnation to issue to his fellow human beings, and one must instead see the artist as one who is allied to the fundamental religious convictions with his community." (Wolterstorff 1980: 144) Art thus serves to confirm rather than challenge in these traditional communities.

By contrast where, "the traditional artist aimed to produce work true in significant respects to what his community found real and important, our high-art artist in the modern West characteristically sets himself over against his society. He aims not to confirm them in their convictions, but to alter their convictions, by showing them how things are, illuminating them, so as to awaken them from their somnolence, or release them from their self-indulgent ideologies, or energize them into action." (Wolterstorff 1980: 146) Thus the modern artist plays a different role to the traditional artist. Some feel that it is important to adopt a challenging stance in the face of 20th century existence. This may well be an important culture-serving activity, but it is not the only one.

Other works of art serve to offer us an escape from reality, whilst some serve to liberate us. For example, Friedrich's Monk by the sea offers us an escape into another spiritual and ill-defined place; it is a retreat from the real world into a Romantic World. Other works might liberate us. Whilst contemplating van Gogh's Starry Night, I am set free by the joyous, potent, celestial force of the painting.

There are various different theories about liberation. For Herbert Marcuse, a Marxist, art is not only called upon to serve the proletarian's struggle for liberation; art is also called upon to serve humanitys' struggle for liberation, which it does serve by its very form, which is a fictive indictment of reality. According to Marcuse, "If the artist has succeeded in creating a genuine work of fiction, by way of transforming ordinary reality, that world constitutes both a criticism of the established order and a sign of release from its dominance." (Wolterstorff 1980: 152) Thus the art work serves both as a recollection of the real world and an indictment of it, and serves to liberate us from the real world and to reconcile us to it.

Furthermore according to Marcuse, beautiful and good art is committed to Eros, to life-enhancing forces, thereby liberating us from Thanatos or destructive or oppressive forces. " As pertaining to the domain of Eros, the beautiful represents the pleasure principle. Thus it rebels against the prevailing reality principle of domination. The work of art speaks a liberatory language, invokes the liberating images of the subordination of death and destruction to the will to live. This is the emancipatory element in aesthetic affirmation." (Wolterstorff 1980: 153) All art which is committed to Eros liberates us from the

oppressive forces of reality.

To use Marcuse's theory of liberation, we could evaluate Max Beckman's The Night as liberating work because it condemns forces of oppression, and if it liberates it will be judged to be good. Rembrandt's Bathsheba might serve to liberate us because of its commitment to life-enhancing forces. But we could say that Vito Acconi's Seedbed does not liberate us because it abdicates before the forces of oppression and alienation. It it committed to Thanatos and therefore according to Marcuse's theory we judge it bad.

By contrast, Andre Malraux has a different concept of liberation. According to Malraux, the artist must set himself free from the dominance of previous masterpieces, and he should overcome nature, style, materials, and his predecessors. Such a concept of liberation is essentially antagonistic, and is premised by an evaluatory criterion that stylistic innovation is the hallmark of liberation. "Every masterpiece," says Malraux, "implicitly or openly, tells of a human victory against the blind forces of destiny." (Wolterstorff 1980: 213) In terms of Malraux's criterion that stylistic innovation is valued, some might evaluate Acconni's Seedbed as a good work of art because it is something new.

Marcuse and Malraux clearly have different concepts of liberation. Their writings are evidence that we value liberation, and use it as a criterion for evaluating works of art. Stylistic innovation has been an important criterion for evaluating much Modernist art, but it is by no means the only criterion for evaluation. There are works of art which are good, but not stylistically innovative. Leger was not

stylistically innovative, yet we evaluate his paintings as good.

Thus there are many purposes for which works of art are made. We evaluate paintings in terms of how well they serve these various purposes, and we cannot hold one purpose as the only evaluatory criterion. We might not be able to agree on the particular purposes that works of art should serve, but we cannot disagree that works of art are cultural artifacts and are made to serve particular purposes within cultures.

In conclusion, this chapter has articulated various artistic criteria pertinent to works of art. These criteria - of profundity of interpretation, truthfulness to major aspects of reality, sincerity of expressed emotion, and the various purposes and effects of works of art apply to the non-aesthetic evaluations of works of art. When using these criteria, we are informed by different theories and cultural pre-occupations, and might therefore argue about various issues within these core concepts.

Although we might argue about all sorts of theoretical differences, I hope to have demonstrated that we cannot argue about the criteria themselves, because these criteria are deeply embedded in our western culture. Admittedly, it might require anthropological research in order to establish whether these four main artistic criteria are cross-culturally applicable. However, even if these specific artistic criteria were not empirically observed in other cultures, similar types of artistic criteria would apply. Thus I claim that all works of art are necessarily evaluated in terms of culture based artistic criteria, although these might vary from culture to culture .

CHAPTER FOUR

Good and Bad Paintings in the Modernist Tradition

All works of art can be evaluated in terms of these core aesthetic and artistic criteria. The aesthetic criteria are more cross-culturally accessible because they are concerned with the actual character of the work itself. As a westerner I can evaluate a Papua New Guinean mask in terms of its unity, complexity and emotional intensity, even if I do not have access to the specific functions and purposes of the mask. However, if I were to have access to the culture which informed the mask, I would make judgements about it in terms of that culture, and these would be artistic types of judgements. These kinds of judgements are much more culture specific and thus less cross-culturally comprehensible. The point I wish to make is that all works of art are cultural artifacts, and all sorts of cultural judgements are made about them. In western society we evaluate works of art for their truthfulness, or sincerity, or profundity, or stylistic innovation, etc. The artistic criteria presented in this essay are perhaps not all the relevant criteria, but they are relevant to the aesthetic problems raised in the artistic tradition of Western Europe in this century. All I claim is that within different cultures artistic types of judgements must be made, because all works of art both derive from and contribute to their informing cultures.

Having argued for the cross-cultural relevance of these aesthetic and artistic criteria, in this last chapter I assume a particular evaluatory position in order to consider which are good or bad

paintings in the Modernist and Post-Modern traditions. This particular evaluatory stance is informed by the theoretical position I have to some extent already articulated: namely, that works of art are expressive symbols, and thus have a structure of their own, but are embedded in the life and culture which informs them. Thus I do not hold with Bell and Fry's separation of art from life. Rather like Fuller and Tolstoy I hold that true and good art is expressive, sincere, imaginative and creative, and that certain normative bases are better than others. For example, Marcuse's concept of liberation better serves the greater interests of humanity and therefore I judge it to be better that Malraux's concept of liberation - which freed the artist from restraints, obligations, society. Such an artist might have the freedom to achieve his genius. Some artists might well produce masterpieces, but it is arguable that they produced them because they were given this elevated status. Malraux's concept of stylistic innovation has been a prime artistic criterion in this century, but it is often achieved at the cost of separating both art and the artist from the larger society.

Some might argue that stylistic innovation and the separation of the artist are necessary challenges to Western 20th century culture, or that such separation is true of an alienated culture. However, others, myself included, hold a different set of ideas and beliefs about which purposes are valid. This is the crucial area of debate in evaluation, because people necessarily make artistic types of judgements in terms of the beliefs and moral or theoretical positions they hold themselves. I hope to have argued coherently for such a position, realizing that it is a position amongst many and thus

does not have the universal application that the core aesthetic criteria have, and to some extent which the core artistic criteria also have.

This chapter briefly traces the development of Modernism; looks at some Post Modern works; and judges which paintings are good or bad within these traditions in terms of the theoretical position I have briefly sketched.

To begin, Leger was, like Matisse, concerned with the formal relationships between abstract elements like form, colour, line. Like Picasso and Braque he represented objects as signs rather than illusions of reality. But his interest was not only formal, he wished to capture the heroic, dynamic consciousness of the age. He wanted to reveal truthfully an idealized consciousness, thus affirming his belief in the vigour of the new mechanical age. His works are good not because they were stylistically innovative - he derived from Picasso and Braque. Nor are they good only because they truthfully referred to conditions of 20th century existence. Rather Leger's paintings are good because they are aesthetically well structured, and they are sincere expressions of a celebratory, heroic and classic philosophy of life.

This early Modernist phase produced some of the finest works in this century. It was when artistic dominance moved to America that the difficulties arose, and they arose out of the drive to eliminate expression. The early formalists had eliminated representation but had never denied expression which some mid-century critics attempted to do. Abstract Expressionists likewise eliminated representation but

constantly battled for the expressiveness of paintings. Mark Rothko set himself against those who sought to divorce expression from abstraction. He said "I'm not an abstractionist ... I'm not interested in the relationships of color or form or anything else. I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions - tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on. And the fact that a lot of people break down and cry when confronted by my pictures shows that I can communicate these basic human emotions ... and if you ... are moved only by their color relationships then you miss the point." (Fuller 1980: 88)

There were those like Ad Reinhardt, "who appeared to wish to reduce Abstract Expressionism to 'pure' painting, i.e. to a non-referential art for art's sake. This position, and it's derivatives, became dominant." (Fuller 1980: 82) The early formalist critics like Bell and Fry had contributed to this separation of art from 'life', which is a position that this essay has argued against.

"Clement Greenberg who was to become the most powerful 'tastemaker' for the art institutions in the 1960's, ... reluctantly came to acknowledge the strength of what he called the 'painterliness' of Abstract Expressionism. But Greenberg was indifferent to the struggle for subject and meaning. .... Greenberg designated the 'symbolic and metaphysical content' of Abstract Expressionism as something 'half-baked'. .... For him, 'the purely plastic or abstract qualities of the work are the only ones that count'. .... there was no such thing as a good painting about anything. He asserts quite simply that the subject is irrelevant." (Fuller 1980: 82)

"Gottlieb, Newman and Rothko declared: 'there is no such thing as good

painting about nothing. We assert simply the subject is crucial." (Fuller 1980: 75) That these artists were able to make these statements, which challenged these impoverished concepts of abstraction and formalism, is testimony to their innate sense of what made paintings good. The Abstract Expressionists were the high point of Modernism and their works are good because they are both profound interpretations of significant subjects and are formally coherent, complex and emotionally intense. But these artists were defeated. "Rothko had begun to chronicle his struggle to overcome feelings of absence, alienation, exile and despair: the narrative of this battle against suicidal depression runs through his work of the sixties into the fearful 'negative spaces' of the grey monochromes he made before taking his life. But despite their occasional 'moments of becoming', even these great artists failed. History had deprived them of representational conventions valid even for a single class view." (Fuller 1980: 77) Rothko could only express his extreme sense of loss, and Francis Bacon could only scream. Their paintings are good because they imaginatively and truthfully express their profound preoccupations; Rothko in a style that was already exhausting itself and Bacon in an anachronistic cask that led nowhere.

Had Abstract Expressionists been under less pressure to deny their expressive symbolic root, they might well have succeeded in establishing a more lasting convention. In Abstract Expressionism " no single artist had fully succeeded in imaginatively grasping and visually representing the new areas of experience, which the pioneers of the movement had promised to open up." (Fuller 1980: 81) By the late 1960's late Modernism set in, during which time few great

paintings were made. "Abstract Expressionism changed from a desperate search into a style, an 'art officiel'. More and more painters produced more and more paintings which got bigger and bigger and emptier and emptier." (Fuller 1980: 81)

Good art mediates the world. This 'art officiel' turned its back on the world. The failure of Abstract Expressionism to consolidate itself, and the subsequent impoverishment of the western artistic tradition, is not only accountable for within the artistic institutions, it was a reflection of a larger cultural malaise, some like to argue. Artists and critics became the priests of high culture, museums were the temples of high culture where the elite could confirm their special status. Art became an idol in a culture whose norms were in a state of confusion. In the absence of a common system of beliefs (a shared symbolic order), art and artists were called upon to fulfill a quasi-religious function. Art is essentially an index of a culture rather than a provider of norms. It can reveal a belief system, but not provide one. Art in the Late Modernist tradition became "an institution without a theory". (Barzun 1973: 19) It was an institution without a coherent normative base.

It was the norms of critics like Greenberg's, that dominated. "... the irreducibility of pictorial art consists in but two constitutive conventions or norms: flatness and the delimitation of flatness. .... This 'the ineluctable flatness of the support' was 'the only condition painting shared with no other art' and hence that to which 'Modernist painting oriented itself'. .... Representation and illusion were held suspect as contradicting flatness" (Fuller 1980: 85)

The Post Painterly Abstractionists pared flatness down, which led to empty colour fields and produced works "whose only value was 'given in visual experience' .... which was dissociated from considerations of meaning, truth, or history." (Fuller 1980: 85) The paring down of paintings to flatness led from empty colour fields to some of the inanities of late Modernism. Some claimed that one saw what one saw, assuming that one referred to nothing whilst engaged in this activity. Aside from its tautological inanity, such an understanding eliminates any form of comprehension contained within a painting. It eliminated the possibility of a painting being an expressive symbol, which is the defining characteristic of a work of art, let alone it being a good one. Clearly the definition of a non-work of art was well on its way. Art could be merely an assemblage of arbitrary objects, or, even worse, no longer even an object, but a happening.

By and large the Avant garde triumphed. Norms for artistic excellence were stylistic innovation, or non-referentiality, or some other absurdities being propagated by the cultural elite who became like aesthetic junkies, ever seeking some new experience or elitist separation. No doubt such a breakdown in culture was true of an alienated society. Sculpture in excrement was perhaps newer than baths in bull's blood, or perhaps it was truer of an alienated society. The pendulum had swung from the cool objectivity of Minimalism to the roaring, privatised subjectivity of the reaction to it, i.e. Anti-art, etc. These movements attempted to reintroduce subject and meaning back into the tradition but remained garbled and inchoate. They offered little resistance to the destructive norms being propagated within the institution of high art.

Pop Art, too, had offered little resistance. It became a passive symbol of an alienated society. True, some pop artists commented on this passivity, thus indicting it (for example Robert Rauschenberg and George Segal), whilst Hockney and Kitaj re-introduced lyricism and elegance. Others, like Warhol, however, merely endorsed a passive consumer-oriented mentality. 'I consume, therefore I am', was his famous saying. His works might be stylistically innovative and truthful, but they collude with, rather than indict, destructive norms, and thus artistically I cannot evaluate them as great. Even in terms of aesthetic judgements, they may have enormous unity but little complexity and virtually no emotional intensity. Their value resides in how powerfully they comment on the vacuousness of modern life.

Within the institution of high art in the last ten Post Modern years there has been a plethora of styles ranging from Conceptualism, and its many manifestations, to Neo Expressionism. Perhaps the single most characteristic feature of all this art is its subjectivity and a return to content and meaning, opposed to the detached objectivity of Abstraction and Minimalism. Where the latter erred in denying the artistic aspects of works of art, the former erred by denying the aesthetic. The Conceptualists went so far as to deny the actual object in favour of the idea. There can be no aesthetic judgements without objects, unless they become literary judgements which no longer pertain to the visual arts. Even if they do change their status to those resembling the literary and theatrical, they are subject to the same aesthetic criteria of unity, etc. Anti-art denied the aesthetic evaluations of works of art , and much recent work in seeking to reinstate content and meaning became so privatised and

incomprehensible, seeking emotional intensity at the cost of a balance between unity and complexity, that they become aesthetically weak. This essay claims that in order for paintings to be judged great they should be both aesthetically and artistically good.

In the last ten years artists have been struggling to find appropriate visual languages in order to express themselves (as all artists throughout the ages have done). However there seem to be some taboos with regard to what can or cannot be done, despite the seemingly great freedom that contemporary artists enjoy. For the Neo Expressionists, neither representation nor abstraction are acceptable. Rather artists seek some kind of inchoate primitive language. There are some who use this type of visual language better than others, for example, Christopher le Brun, whose paintings allude to some lost arcadian state. However, the vast majority of Neo Expressionists are less coherent than le Brun is, and consequently produce privatised and inchoate disasters. To be inchoate is not, I suspect, a ground for normative excellence.

The value of Neo Expressionism is a drive to relearn our primitive urges, to mediate a return to the archaic and primitive. Christopher le Brun is one of the better Neo Expressionists, but he admits its limitations. "Something has shifted. There's a bad faith in my generation, a split - and our relationship to the subject has become more complex. By temperament I'm an aspirational painter after Turner or Blake, but that avenue is closed both theoretically and practically. Its a cultural dilemma, not a personal one - sometimes I wonder whether Post-Modernism isn't pathological in its dilemma

between the abstract and the figurative." (Kent 1983: 46)

In opposition to these struggling attempts at painting are the slick and stylized celebrations of alienation, for example Gilbert and George. The images they make are undoubtedly aesthetically well structured and they may well deal with a significant subject, i.e. alienation, but their interpretation of that alienation is limited and normatively impoverishing. There is no mediation or resolution, no expressive catharsis. Clinically referring to alienation simply aids and abets it; it offers no release or catharsis. The indictment offered is cancelled by the level of collusion.

Other artists like Leon Kossof, state equally desperate realities, but his interpretation of alienation fully recognizes the anguish of alienation. These works are sincere expressions of profound emotions. Gilbert and George merely refer to the emotions of alienation; they are not sincere expressions of emotions but clinical and manipulative references to them. Thus in terms of Marcuse's theory they are not committed to life and liberation, and some would judge them to be artistically bad.

Post-Modernism "fails to offer any alternative to this anaesthetic reality, or the anti-art which it spawned. As Kantova herself puts it: 'At the beginning of the seventies painting seemed to have been finally overridden, but with the arrival of the post-modern, it made a triumphant return to the art scene, displaying its great ability to assimilate the most diverse elements (such as some aspects of performance, installation or photography), to the point of formulating anti-painting, kitsch, neo-naif, neo-expressionism and neo-baroque, to

name but a few.' Thus painting is prostituted: its capacity to offer 'other realities within the existing one', to participate in the cosmos of hope, is lost sight of entirely .... As for what painting can be: that is another story. But the roots of good painting remain in its traditions, its real skills, its accumulated knowledges, techniques and practices, for which the transavanguardists show only contempt, or ignorance. And, as for that absence of a shared symbolic order ... Even if we have ceased to believe in God, nature can provide it for us: The answer lies not in the reproduction of appearances, but in an imaginative perception of natural form." (Fuller 1985: 15-16)

Outside the Modernist and Post Modern enclaves there have of course been artists and groups of artists in western culture who have continued with traditional practices and concepts. Edward Hopper throughout the high moments of abstraction continued to make representational paintings coherently differentiated and emotionally profound. Robert Natkin continued the abstract expressive tradition long after the demise of Abstract Expressionism proper, and his paintings are sincere expressions of lyrical and remembered psychological states.

A good school of traditional subject and method was the British school initiated by David Bomberg. His idea of the 'spirit of the mass' is "a man's passionate identification with the promise or the threat of a place". (Berger 1981: 96) This identification has been a feature of his followers - the best being Leon Kossof and Frank Auerbach. When one contemplates Kossof's paintings one encounters a sense of surviving a hostile world. His paintings are good because "Their practice is one of reconciliation, in illusion between the self and

the social and physical worlds. They offer something the new expressionists cannot: a redemption through form." (Fuller 1985: 16) This tradition continues to sustain some of the best artists of the present epoch; namely, Auerbach, Hockney, Kitaj, Lucien Freud to name a few. This tradition did not attempt to deny the inherent representational and expressive properties of paintings, and consequently did not erode itself as the Modernist and Post Modern traditions did.

Having a healthy tradition, informed by an acceptable normative base , the good artists were in a position to express themselves sincerely and imaginatively, to practice reconciliation, to interpret a significant subject profoundly. There might be lesser artists working in the same tradition, and what distinguishes them from the great artists of that tradition is their inability to fulfill the aesthetic or artistic requirements of good paintings.

John Ruskin claimed that "originality depends on ... A man who has the gift, will take up any style that is going, the style of his day, and will work in that and be great in that". (Fuller 1985: 11) Ruskin presupposed that any style was exempt from its own erosion, unlike late Modernism and Post Modernism. Some styles are informed by poor or weak informing values, and even if these are true reflections of the society which produces these styles, such normative bases will never be ground for truly great paintings.

The failure of the late Modernist and Post Modern styles led to an enormous plurality of avant garde styles (anti-art, Neo Expressionism, Conceptual art, etc.). Each style battled for supremacy in the face of

an ever-diminishing set of options. Stylistic innovation was the hallmark of success. In this paranoid atmosphere, art remained 'art for art's sake'. Art is not an imitation of life - the formalists have at least established that. Art is good because of "its compass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of revolt or the largeness of hope in it." Great art "finds its logical, its architectural place in the great structure of human life" because "it has something of the soul of humanity in it." (Greene 1966: 83)

This chapter has judged whether some works of art in the Modernist and Post Modern traditions are good or bad in terms of a specific set of artistic criteria. These criteria are concerned with life-informing normative positions, with profundity, sincerity of expression, truth, and the true aesthetic dimension. Works of art which are only informed by the desire to be stylistically innovative or which sought to separate art from 'life' have generally lacked the appropriate above-mentioned artistic requirements, and have been judged to be bad works of art. Although this is a critical position amongst many, I hope to have argued for its validity.

CONCLUSION

Although this essay has covered a vast amount of information and has not fully dealt with many of the issues raised (due to the limited scope of this essay), it has established a framework of criteria for the evaluation of paintings. This framework consists of aesthetic and artistic core evaluatory criteria in terms of which we can cross-culturally evaluate works of art.

We can understand most works of art in terms of their aesthetic characteristics because these apply to the actual character of the work itself. Matters of unity, complexity and emotional intensity apply to all works of art, and we can cross-culturally make judgements about paintings in terms of these criteria. We do so because as humans we share all sorts of biological and psychological responses to visual stimuli. These aesthetic criteria are grounded in a definition of a painting being an expressive symbol, either an abstract one or a representational one.

Similarly, we judge a work of art in terms of aspects which relate it to the society or to greater human existence. These artistic criteria are sometimes less cross-culturally comprehensible than the aesthetic criteria are because they are informed by cultural concerns. In some cases one needs to be a practicing member of a culture in order to understand them, whilst for others these artistic references are to greater human concerns, and are thus more cross-culturally comprehensible.

In terms of western 20th century aesthetic preoccupations, the core artistic criteria are concerned with truth, profundity, sincerity and differing purposes of works of art. I am tempted to say that these core artistic criteria apply to all cultures, perhaps because they serve the basic interests of cultures in general. But such an assertion would require some anthropological investigation that is beyond the scope of this essay. All I can assert is that within all cultures there will be artistic types of evaluations, and that specifically within 20th century western culture there are these core artistic criteria which we cannot argue about, although we might well argue about issues raised within these core criteria.

The aesthetic and artistic criteria address the first task this essay set itself; i.e. to articulate a set of cross-cultural evaluatory criteria which are grounded in a cross-cultural theory of art.

The second issue this essay addressed itself to was the matter of a particular evaluative position, which is affected by its cultural context. To say that theories are culturally affected does not mean that all theories are relative to the culture which informs them, and that we cannot make judgements about them. Good evaluation presupposes some good theory.

I hope to have articulated a good theory for evaluation, which is located in the structure of art, and a recognition that art is intimately bound up with 'life'. Furthermore I adopt a theoretical position which asserts that art should serve the best interests of mankind. i.e. Art should liberate us, mediate our experience of the world or reconcile us to it, or reveal the truth of some aspects of

reality or indict other aspects of reality . Good works of art truthfully express and communicate profound feelings. They are informed by a life-enhancing normative base and are committed to 'the true aesthetic dimension'. This theoretical position is not a universal criterion, as people hold many different theoretical positions; rather it is the flexible component in an otherwise inflexible core concept, that works of art are informed by theoretical or moral issues, and that criticism is similarly informed by theoretical and moral positions which also become matters for evaluation.

Having a framework of criteria for evaluation is an aid to evaluation, not a carbon copy for it. Our judgements will always be affected by which theoretical positions we hold to be valid - and about which we might argue. We thus have objective core criteria for evaluating paintings, but within these criteria there is much room for discussion and argument. Thus Criticism is a creative act, it does not have strict rules independent of time and place, because our theoretical positions will always be culturally affected. This essay has attempted to unravel some of the aesthetic issues prevalent in 20th century culture, and thereby to articulate both a coherent critical position and a set of core concepts which inform criticism.

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